

Songs gone Unsung

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Side stories from 'Of the River and the Sea'. Includes canon snippets that didn't quite fit, AU's of the story, and crack. SI/OC. Shenanigans. It's all shenanigans.

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Kiri's Lament

I do not own Naruto

From the moment Hideki Kaito laid eyes on the girl he knew there was something off about her.

He knew it in the same way he knew the number of kunai in his hip pouch and the way he could recall exactly what he had eaten last night. It was common knowledge, something that seemed to him like everyone should know. Looking at her doll like features and perfectly kept hair, he could see that there was something off.

He knew it in the way he knew when he was being watched and when an enemy was stalking his steps. It was instinctual, on a level that churned his gut and raised the hair on the back of his neck. Hearing her husky voice and clear, blunt wording, he could tell that this was not a child. It was an imposter, a spirit.

The first time he saw her she was seven, fresh from the streets of the red light district, and she walked with a confidence and surety that belonged to no child. Her expressive face was too clean for something from the bottom of the world, her skin too unblemished for a resident of the bloody mist.

She was bred from whores blood and weak willed patrons, stock that refused to defend themselves and could not strike out. He was sure she was just more fodder for the seduction corps, a fresh pound of flesh to add to the stables. The rumors said she was the daughter of a high end harlot and that she would grow as slender and inviting as her mother. A few even spoke of how pretty she already was, how exotic her tan skin was in a sea of white, how fragile and cute she looked. She was a master of wordplay already, a prodigy hidden in plain sight in the den of inequity. She would bat her lashes and

people would fall to their knees for her. She had charmed one of the mythical seven swordsmen and captured his apprentices heart.

Other whispers were quieter, speaking lowly of a corpse in the alleyways. These were darker, and Kaito found himself somehow not surprised and deeply unsettled. She fed on flesh, they hissed. She was four and she broke a man with her tiny untrained hands, led him into an alleyway and tore out his throat to taste the blood beneath. She bewitched the swordsmen and played with the soul of a child to bend him to her will.

The boy, the apprentice, the demon little Zabuza, he trailed in after her, and he believed.

The girl was not right, he screamed in his mind. She feels like death and decay.

Still, he observed, and for all appearances, she acted like one. She and the boy grew close, separate from the main group and gangs of young ones.

When they trained, she was slow and lacked endurance. She couldn't throw for the life of her and her strength, while good, was not record setting. Her only high point seemed to be that she could stretch and bend, but never break. He thought that perhaps he was wrong, that he was being paranoid and that missions had been trickling in too fast for him.

Only when he set her against the Hozuki did he cement his thoughts. She didn't need speed or endurance or raw strength. She was running water, flowing around and absorbing strikes, nimbly dodging away from punishing blows. The little whore's girl went up against a clan member, bred and raised for this, trained in the art of flowing like liquid, and she showed him that there was no meaning to the kata's and stances unless he was as she was. Unless he became the river and the seas. She struck him down with a blow to the head, nevermind that he was taller.

The demon boy on the other side of the field left his partner with multiple fractures and stared possessively in the distance.

The unease inside him grew.

The problem was, that by all accounts- *the thing, the impostor, the whore's child* know as *Watanabe Ryuish i*,- was an average student. By Kiri standards she was almost explementary, never standing out too hard, excelling only in certain area, easily dispensable. She was good at class work, but not too good. She fought well enough, but not so well that it was a threat. The fact that she was also a good tool and seemingly bullied by the apprentice Zabuzo spoke well of her intrinsic knowledge of her place in the world.

The higher ups saw her giving him food and yielding to his demands and thought about how subservient she was. It pleased them to know one of their future swordsman not only could tame such a spitfire, but that she was knowing enough to serve him.

He saw them together and saw a wolf slowly being trained, a silent hunter being bought piece by piece. With every touch, every conflict, every morsel, she made him her own loyal vassal.

They laughed and told him no child could do such a thing, and if it ever came to be, they would dispose of her like the rest. Could he not see the way she catered to him?

Kaito was there the day the boy showed off his chakra and he was stunned like the rest. It was foul and malevolent, poisonous and vile. He flinched and was tossed back to the dying fields and torture chambers in his mind.

The thing beside him did not even flinch and instead controlled her pet, drawing him away and rewarding him with violence.

On a survival exercise, teaching the students to live off the land, she built her lean to and made camp faster than some chunin he knew. The boy settled in before the fire she coaxed to life while she went

off to gather food. His fellow instructors laughed and called her little nadeshiko, the perfect miniature house wife. She made shelter and warm meals, made sure the boy was comfortable.

Only, when she came back she was carrying two live rabbits. She smiled sweet and coy for the instructors and snapped the first ones neck cleanly and it died without a sound. Gratified they walked away.

Then she looked him straight in the eyes, and he saw the nothingness inside her, the hungry call of eternity. He saw darkness that stretched forever and a rage like an endless tide. He stood, frozen, and the furry thing in her hand struggled against her. It's paws made scratches and drew blood, but she uttered no cries and said no words, only clasped it with an iron grip. Inevitably, she moved her tiny fist up to its slender throat and jerked her wrist.

This time, the rabbit squealed, a rasping, shrieking noise. It's neck was broken poorly, bent unnaturally, and it's body helplessly fought against her tiny fingers, gurgling and foaming for breath. The agony must have been incredible, and even as heartless as he was, he wanted to put it out of it's misery. The thing was a marble statue, a phantom made of stone illuminated by the dancing shadows cast from flames.

She stared him in the eyes, and ended it.

He found himself scolding her for the poor kill, and she looked ashamed. Like she had actually felt something for the creature, or that she wanted his approval. Like she cared at all. Like this wasn't a silent message meant for those who looked on.

Struggle and fight, and you may draw blood, but she will make you scream before you die.

Still his superiors do nothing and his coworkers begin to whisper behind his back. They call him paranoid and delusional. They tell him to buck up and stop fretting because she is just a child, a little girl who can be found wearing kimono and playing with make up. They

say she likes sweets and steamed food, and that she enjoys playing in water and hates getting dirty. Her handwriting is poor even if she is mildly more intelligent than her peer. It means nothing. She will grow up and become a honeypot, she will sell her body for her country, and then be on her way. Her training begins next year.

He wants to scream.

They take the children to the lake, and teach them how to swim. Only, she know it already, and she moves unseen with the skill of a master. The instructors grin and comment on how they have never seen such natural talent since Hoshigaki Kisame, and isn't he the one that tested her? They laugh and begin betting on which apprentice will grow tired of the toy first.

They are blind, they do not see. She moves like water inside and out of it. She is too at home here, in a way no human be. She leaps and arcs in and out, propelling herself around with abandon. Even the Hozuki is hard pressed to keep up. Kaito sees her thick black hair trailing behind her thinks of legends of snake women and sirens, water spirits who look so natural, filled with the desire to drown and destroy and main. The ruin of humans and the bane of sailors, with hearts full of sin and lives that stretch on forever.

They have forgotten the old tales, he thinks, of what happens when you force a mermaid onto land.

The graduation day comes for the older class and he silently looks forward to getting away and taking normal missions on break. He is stifled by these brats, their loud noises and constant stupidity.

He goes to watch for some sport and the dog appears, wielding a live blade instead of a bokken. He goes on a bloodthirsty rampage and cuts the children down, room by room, neck by neck. It is impressive, if not ruthless. He is sure to be bumped up and graduated after this. Kaito can only hope her corpse is among the dead.

But no, she appears, staggering and teary eyed. He is impressed by how thoroughly wrecked she looks, how stricken by death she is. She stares out at the mangled bodies of children, and she weeps.

Then she roars.

She comes down like a vengeful spirit, pushing her dog down again and again. The boy's demonic chakra sings, and hers rises to greet it in harmony. Poison and hollowness compete in the air, and he feels sick as the witch child and demon boy fight.

It is impressive and ruthless, and they tear at each other like rabid animals, but in the end, when she comes so close to killing him, she stays her hand.

She whispers teary apologies to the boy and embraces him, telling him that she should have helped him with this. The higher ups laugh when they hear and marvel about how well the Momochi boy has trained his pet. They coo about how strong she was, how capable of a fighter, and they scrap their plans and fill the hollow in their ranks. They graduate them both and write them down as an assault duo.

Hideki Kaito watches them go and does not voice his protests. Hopefully she will die before the year is out, unsuited for the role she was cast in.

He thinks of empty eyes and doll faces and the sound of a screaming animal struggling fruitlessly in her hands. He thinks of the devotion of a boy who struck when she was not there, and the hollow taint that lurks inside her.

He tries to shove it away, to repress. He has taken enough insults for the sake of the little witch. He moves on with his life and ignores everything but cannot help but feel as if they have created something terrible and that, perhaps, they are the rabbits in her hand.

AN: So remember when I said I had a few ficlets related to the story? Well here they are. This will be snippets related to the Of The River and The Sea story. Some will be Canon, some crack, some AU idea's I came up with involving the characters.

SO! Here we have the long awaited view of Ryuishi from her academy instructors eyes! This is a canon side chapter.

Also! We welcome my precious, coveted new beta, aturnofthepage! Bless them. Their awesome and totally great and fixing up my clutter.

Fluid Grace

I do not own Naruto.

Kisame Hoshigaki thinks that there is something telling about the way a person fights. He might have trouble understanding complicated equations and cooking may as well be a black art to him, but fighting, well, that is something he knows.

Whether it is an exchange of fists, the clash of swords, or the meeting of jutsu, there is something that he can read from his opponent when they meet on the battlefield. There is an art to it, he supposes, telling what a person is from how they struggle in strife.

His teacher, he thinks, fights with cunning. Every swing of the great blade Samehada in his hands is a decisive blow, calculated to deliver the optimum amount of damage to the intended target. It is a lot like the way he lives his life, each choice made to bring in the greatest amount of gain. The decision to take him on as his apprentice was weighed and considered heavily, and it meant more that way, because it meant Kisame had beat out all the other options. He had shown the greatest amount of potential, shining like a jewel above all others. Maybe he was rough, perhaps he needed cutting to gleam the best, buffing to bring out the luster. Yet, he was chosen all the same.

Watching his master fight, or fighting against him, is like a chess match. He has to think ahead, anticipate moves and think about possibilities. He has to read the subtle turning of the wrist and extension of the hand and know what is to come. It is from this man he learns to turn his hunger for battle into a passion, and he never tires of it.

Zabuza, he thinks, fights with purpose. He struggles and roars like a wild animal at times; others he is completely silent. Each of his

movements has meaning. The stroke of his blade sings out and it says 'I am here, I will win.' He fights to kill, to intimidate, to destroy. When Zabuzza picks up his sword or forms a jutsu, there is a message behind each move, a reason to fight. It can be as small as an insult or as large as a threat to life, but he never takes up a fight without reason.

Sparing with the younger apprentice is a clash of wills, a measuring stick for each other. Their style is different, but not wholly unrecognizable when pitted against each other. Kisame fights to fight, and Zabuzza fights to fight him. He has to push to win, to strain and want it. Each clash of their blades takes muscle and grit, a contest to see who will fall first. From Zabuzza, Kisame learns that determination can be more useful than most would think.

His other teammate throws him for a long time. He thinks at first that she is like Zabuzza, fighting for a purpose, a cause, her movements fluid and striving. Then he thinks perhaps she is a planner, like his teacher, because her kicks and swipes seem planned from the very start, her eyes constantly assessing the world around her and how to use it.

It is not until he sees her lose herself during the ambush that he figures her out, and when he does, he is appalled.

Ryuishi fights with desperation. Each light step of her foot and swing of her chain is a measured scream, crying out against forces greater than herself. She fights because she has no other choice, because she is driven and mad. He sees her lose herself to something needy and rage filled, hateful and hungry for change. Every twitch of her fingers that folds an illusion over her opponents is a desire to control something out of reach. The howls that leave her lips are cries of despair and anger, a rejection of the reality around them.

Going against her is like dancing, he thinks, because there is something intimate about seeing that in the surly girl. Her feet leap and bound and swing, setting a rhythm to a song he doesn't know. She jumps high in the air as if she can sprout wings and fly free. She

dives deep below as if the water can hide her from whatever it is. Ryuishi is constantly moving around, never defending ground or giving it, just flitting and bending around and around until her opponent is just as twisted up as she is.

She never stops fighting either.

She is constantly at war, inside the village and out. He sees it in her empty eyes, the desperation to prove some point, the need for something he cannot name. It colors her words and temperament, pushing her to become aggressive and foul mouthed at times and tender and compassionate at others.

It is only after she abandons them both that he understands. After he has seen the people -the family- he has never known that he gets it. She is lost and crazy, and she is desperate to have them. He doesn't think she can reach them though, because they seemed so distant, so far away in the genjutsu. Untouchable, untaintable.

Kisame thinks that Ryuishi was so desperate, so hungry for a change, she ran. She abandoned him and Zabuza, searching for her illusionary world, covering her fear with bravado and anger. He doesn't know how long she existed like that, hating the Village, blaming it for taking them away, but one day he plans to ask her.

AN: Another little flash fic! This time some thought Kisame has on Ryuishi and his partners!

This is another canon fic.

A shout out to aturnofthepage, the beta of this series! Everyone love them! Also, I should mention this will update irregularly.

Childhood Heroes

I do not own Naruto.

Toshi is nine years old when he meets the Rakki Ryuu.

He's heard about her his whole life, only, he hadn't known they were a her until the day he meets her. He's grown up with stories told of them, and sometimes it was a them, sometimes a he, sometimes a her, sometimes both. He just knows that his friend, Kimihasu, that moved in when he was five, who had long white hair and red eyebrows, said that the Lucky Dragon saved their lives.

Kimi and her mom were cool, and they didn't talk a lot, but sometimes at night, Kimi's mom would tell them that the Lucky Dragon had sent word to the mothers and children that something called a 'purge' was going to happen. She said that the Lucky Dragon had given them time to escape, and though she was sad her husband was lost to them, she was not sad that she made the choice she had. She said she would make it again.

She tells them stories of a team, who were the best of friends. He likes them, and so do a lot of the children. Often, when the field work is done and Kimi's mom gets caught up at the clothes store, the kids will play games about them. He always likes to be the Chujitsuna Same, because sharks are cool, and Kimi will play Rakki Ryuu and then one of the others, sometimes Hotaro, sometimes Misami, will be Odayaka Oni. They'll run around and catch fish from the creek and fight the bad guys off.

It's fun, and sometimes, and about every two years, a group of people will travel through. They call themselves Mumei, which is weird, because he doesn't know if you can be nameless if you have a name.

Anyway, the Mumei are always fun, and they teach him how to make a cool bracelet out of fishbones and they say nice things. They tell him that he means a lot, and that he deserves to be alive just because he was born. They say that everyone deserves a chance, and every one is just as good as everyone else, just that some people are good at different things. He decides that makes a lot of sense, because even though Kimi can walk up tree's -which is supposed to be a secret, so, don't tell anyone, okay?- Toshi can tell when it's about to rain and can cook way better than her. It's stuff his grandad taught him, but all Kimi says about her grandad is that her mom told her that 'the men of the clan were stupid and pigheaded. We would not let them take us and their children to their graves with them.' Which he doesn't get, but, okay.

So Toshi knows about the Rakki Ryuu, in the same way he knows about the Sage of Six Paths and Bijuu. They're far away, just fun stories to think about. That is, until they aren't.

Because one winter, bandits come and Kimi's mom gets hurt trying to fight them. It's scary, because even though his uncle broke his leg working with the buffalo in the fields last year, he hasn't seen that much blood, ever. Kimi cries and so does he, and his mom and dad, who never really talked about Kimi or her mom, they come over and help. They tell him that if Kimi's mom hadn't fought them, then they might have starved and the bandits might have done bad things to them. They say that even though they she might not have gotten them all, that she got enough and protected the town.

Things get better between the grown ups, but not with the bandits. They come again, and Kimi's mom is still hurt. They take a lot of stuff and his aunt dies and he's never been so scared in his life. He doesn't know what to do, he has no clue.

Then, one day, a snake comes. Kimi's mom looks at it like she's scared, or grossed out, and he understands when the snake throws up a piece of paper. It is gross, but Kimi's mom picks it up and reads it on the bed before telling him to get his parents.

Two weeks later, after another attack, a traveler comes through. She not a grown up, not all the way, but she has candy and she gives it out. He gets some melon flavored ones that look like green glass in the sun, and he likes her right away. Later, she meets with the grown ups and they talk about a bunch of stuff, like secrets and security and... schools?

Kimi's mom keeps looking at her like she can't decide what to do with her face. Sometimes it's scary and blank, and others she smiles softly, and sometimes she's a little angry.

He waits, and later that night he hears them talking when he's sleeping over.

"The snake? Treacherous, vile-" Kimi's mom says.

"Kaguya-san. I'll ask you not to speak like that about him." the stranger answers.

"He has my sister!" she says, and she sounds really angry.

"Any clan members that are there remain with him out of respect. He gave them refuge."

"Refuge from the war you started! The Kaguy-"

Suddenly there's a feeling like he can't breath, like something is choking him. A pressure on his back that weighs him down and makes him afraid, so afraid. He feels like a mouse in the eyes of a hawk, or a fish on the end of his hook. Something is going to kill him, he can feel it.

"The Kaguya that remained are dead. So are the Yuki and Hozuki. I told you no lies, and you made the choice. I exist because that treacherous snake saved my life. You exist because I believe in mercy, even to those who systematically beat me down. Do you think for a second I don't remember the clean walls and good food given to the clans? Do you think for a single moment I have forgotten the

way you spat at the civilian candidates of the academy, or the whores of the red light? Do you think the Mumei would be so forgiving of the nobles who kept them starved and abandoned on the streets, without me there to remind them that everyone deserves a few chances?" the traveler's voice says, and it sounds cold.

"I thought that maybe, that whoever wanted freedom could take it. There remains a Kaguya clan because of me. It's scattered, but alive, just like the other clans. I asked nothing from you for this gift, and all I ask now is that you never speak of my partnership to anyone and speak respectfully about the man who helped me save you. It was not easy to cover the tracks of so many."

There's a choking noise, and he thinks he can't breath. There is a small gasp from above, and the pressure lets off.

"Ryuu-sama-"

A breath, something like a sigh.

"I apologize. I was meant to come here and help, not become irrational and let old feelings ruin everything." the traveler says.

"You... are right. I would not have my life if not for you, nor the life of my child. It was not my place." replies Kimi's mom.

"No, it is always a person's right to question, Kaguya-san. If you can't talk to me and tell me what you think I'm doing wrong, then I am a poor leader. That said, I think we can agree to disagree. Will you-?"

There is a relieved laugh that floats in from outside.

"I will keep your secret, just as you have kept the Kaguya's."

Toshi goes to sleep knowing that what happened was scary, but secure in the knowledge that adults are weird.

The stranger leaves that morning, and Kimi's mom watches her go. She says she'll come back, and she's right. She does come back,

her shirt ripped and back showing, and the mark on her back is wild and tribal. He knows it, from the stories of the Mumei, a big cat and wolf chasing each other, circled by the skeleton of a snake that hangs down her spine. She's carrying a bag in her hand. She walks through town like she owns it, right down to the headman's house, and drops the bag. Grain spills out.

"The bandits have been dealt with. The grain is in a cave about fifteen miles from here." She tells them, and all around people cheer. One of the elders comes and takes her hand, raising it into the air to face the crowd.

"Tonight, a feast to honor the Rakki Ryuu, the one who saved us from starvation and avenged our fallen!" The town cheers louder, and Kimi lets out a squeal by his side, chanting the name over and over again, staring at the woman. Toshi thinks that she might pass out in excitement. He is also pretty excited. The Rakki Ryuu gave him candy!

There is a feast, and a big bonfire. The Rakki Ryu sits by the headman and eats a lot, and gives away more candy. Then she dances with everyone. She laughs and spins, and he doesn't think he's seen anyone be so graceful. Kimi almost dies when the Lucky Dragon bows and asks her to go around the fire, and he decides to tease her for the rest of her life about how red her face gets when she squeaks out a yes. She spins his friends around on the top of her feet before picking her up and tossing her in the air and catching her again. He watches the Rakki Ryuu bend down and whisper something in her ear. Later, Kimi will confide in him and tell him that the Lucky Dragon said she was proud that Kimi's mother protected the town, and that Kimi and her mom let her know that good things can come from bad places.

Then, the Rakki Ryuu smiles at him from across the way. The big orange flames of the bonfire cast shadows on her face, and Toshi thinks that there might actually be a dragon under her skin, because her eyes are old and a little bit scary. Her smile is warm though, and she gives him more candy and asks how he is. She listens too, and

they both agree that river carp are hard to cook, but taste best when rubbed with chile and spice.

"Did you really save Kimi and her mom?" he asks

She hums and she looks at the duo, chatting excitedly by his parents, eating plates of food that they thought they wouldn't have.

"I don't think I saved anyone. I think I made a choice that let them save themselves." she tells him. He blinks and furrows his brows.

"What?" he asks. She laughs and he thinks about how nice it sounds, husky and light.

"I have no clue either. Just kind of improvising, don't tell anybody though."

"Alright." he agrees. He doesn't know what he would tell people, but he promises not to anyway.

She leaves, but Toshi never forgets her. He never forgets the taste of honeydew melon candy or the way Kimi freaked out. He'll always remember laughter and dancing by the fire, the heavy aura that she made when she was mad, or the way her eyes looked in the fire.

The town gets a new school, and Kimi's mom teaches there. Kimi says something about clans and education, but all he knows is that sometimes, after fieldwork, he gets to learn stuff. Like a ninja, but better, because he gets to learn about plants and breeding, which is way cooler, even if he does have to sit down and be quiet in class. He learns to read for the first time, and then later so does his dad. He has never seen his father look so proud in his life.

Turns out Toshi is really good with numbers, and Kimi is really good at building stuff. They help out with the wagons and the stock, and his family business spreads and they get their own store. It's awesome.

The Rakki Ryuu saved his town from bandits. She saved his best friend and her mom from dying. He thinks about all the stories told about her, and the things she's done. He thinks about the Mumei, who told him he was okay as he was, and how cool they are. Toshi thinks a lot of things. Mostly though, he thinks about the Rakki Ryuu, and how proud he is to have met her, how wonderful she she was. He understands why the Mumei follow her, because he wants to as well. One day, maybe, they'll meet again. He hopes she still has some of that melon candy when they do.

AN: SO! I got a lot of requests for this, see, I listen. Still here, just a thing I wrote before the trip. Some internet here, but eh. This is a cannon in the story as well, some of the interaction that is written about in OTRATS, but the things that go unseen. Some important details, but not a lot. Mostly just some things on how Ryuuishi is winning the people's favor and changing things up. Education of the lower classes will be important later on.

Yay! Stuff!

A big, fat, warm thanks to my beta, aturnofthepage. They're awesome and where a huge help with sentence structure this time around, where I kept changing my mind about what I wanted to say in the middle of saying it, then didn't change what I had already wrote. I hope they find money on the ground.

The Medallion

I do not own Naruto, The Avengers, Ranbo, or the A-team.

Haku has known Master Zabuza for a very long time now. He knows that saying this is relative, because he is not very old in the first place, but years mean a lot to somebody his age.

Haku is seven, and two years ago he was rescued from the cold backwater bridges of Water Country by the man sitting in front of him. After losing everything, he was given life again, and he would never forget or forsake the one who gifted it to him.

Zabuza-sama was a busy man, being an Anbu Hunter captain and one of the legendary seven, but he never left Haku behind, never missed a scheduled training date or checkup. Even if no words were exchanged the whole time, he was there. He was stable. He was something Haku could depend on.

By definition, Zabuza was not an energetic and upbeat person. If there was no need for words, none would be spoken. If an exchange was made, it would be done quickly and systematically. If there was training, it was completed with brutal efficiency, squeezing the most results out of the time and effort spent. He was not a merciful or lackadaisical teacher, and he left Haku no room for failure.

Sometimes the boy would lay down for the night and feel the bruises on his skin, the ache in his muscles, and he would lavish in it. These things were tangible proof that he held his master's attentions, that somebody saw him and was raising him to be useful. The pain was a physical reminder that he was becoming a better tool, better able to serve Zabuza-sama. He would be Zabuza's, not Kiri's. This was their secret.

He was pleased.

There were other things though, little things that shone out like stars in the night, beacons of warmth and kindness. They did not come often, but Haku treasured every second of them, ran the memories of them over and over again in his head until he could recall every sense that had been used. Every sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and emotion burned into his memory so he would never forget them.

They were small, like the way Master Zabuzza would braid his hair before training, his fingers dexterously pulling back the lock with a practiced ease and tying them off with deft pulls of twine. Haku doesn't know where his master learned such a skill, but when he asked, the stern and stoic faced shinobi had shifted for a moment. He looked up, away from the campfire and into the night, replying simply,

"A girl taught me."

Sometimes, Zabuzza-sama would tell him stories. Either in the barracks or on the streets, in the woods or hidden by the sea. They would make Haku smile, he liked hearing about the A-team, which seemed to be his leader's favorite. Other times it would be about a missing nin named Ranbo, or a team of Kekkei Genkai users named the Avengers. Haku's favorite was about the giant serpent who made the world, and the warriors with painted faces who it made. Zabuzza-sama wasn't very good at telling stories, but he treasured the moments anyways.

There was also the way his teacher would stop and watch him as he panted for breath. It was the on the days that Zabuzza-sama pushed him harder than usual. His master would look at him and wait, patiently observing, and sometimes Haku felt tested under the weight of that gaze, like he was being compared to something or someone else. The moment would pass, but every time it happened his teacher would end their time together with a meal. Not one that he cooked, because for all his skills, Haku was uncertain that he could complete such a task. It was mundane and beneath his teacher, the child thought. Yet, when eating, his teacher would be quieter than usual, and his hand not filled with utensils would caress

the medallion hanging at the end of the Kubikiribocho's handle, his callused thumbs stroking over it's surface again and again.

The medallion had been there as long as he could remember, shining a lustrous golden-bronze even in the dense fog. He knew that this was his master's addition to the great sword, but for a long time he did not ask. He just watched his master handle it.

Sometimes Zabuza-sama would sit silently by the fire, and in the dancing light of the flames, he would detach the charm and hold it in the palm of his hands, staring at it with a stone face. It would glitter against his pale skin, taking the light and reflecting it a hundred-fold, making the darkness around them seem less threatening, banishing the worst of the shadows away from their space. His master would pull an expression, something the child hesitated to call a smile. It looked like one, if a smile could be hungry and distant and cold all at once.

Once, he met his taciturn teacher's fellow swordsmen. The man was a giant, stretching up so high the boy thought that perhaps he was blue because he could touch the sky. The man had come in, serious faced with a mission scroll in his hand, see Haku, and a frown took over his lips. Haku had been nervous, thinking perhaps he had displeased his leader's friend somehow. Or broken the cover given to him, an errand boy, and that his teacher would face the shinobi because he could not keep his secret correctly. Panic had filled him, with thoughts of shame and distress. His heart had beat wildly in his chest as the tall blue man had stalked forward, and he had flinched when the man outstretched his massive hand. He had expected pain, a blow perhaps. What he had not expected was for the man with the blue skin to tear the hair stick out of his bun and glare at it with an unreasonable amount of anger. He said nothing to Haku, but when Master Zabuza had stepped forward, out of the privy, the blue giant had glared at his teacher.

"Are you trying to make the boy look like her?" he asked, his eyes darting to the medallion dangling from his blade.

His teacher grunted and shifted the pack on his back. The blue man had narrowed his already small eyes.

"She left us." he said, and Zabuza looked pointedly at the blue gem hanging around the other man's neck.

"Never said she didn't." his teacher answered.

Haku had the feeling that there was something gone unsaid. Like there was more to it than that.

At the time he had just felt relief that he hadn't messed up and disappointed his teacher.

His teacher gave him many orders that made no sense to him, but Haku would do his best to complete them, as if they were missions just for him. The only time he ever balked was when his teacher told him 'to make friends.'

Haku didn't understand what that was, or why he need them. His teacher couldn't explain it himself, but Haku tried anyway.

He never felt like he completed that one, but he was glad he tried. It was kind of fun to play tag and hide and seek. Sometimes the girls and boys in the akasen would play dress up, and he liked that a lot too. They would wrestle, and he would hide his true strength, and there was something... exciting about it. He liked it a lot.

When he told Zabuza, the man would looked pleased, and simply nod. Haku and his teacher could not put it into words, but even if they never knew the truth, having somebody to do silly things with was nice. When asked how he knew, Zabuza-sama would get that look on his face again, touch the medallion, and say,

"A girl taught me."

Eventually, after his seventh birthday, he would broke down and ask, shifting over in his sleeping bag, his short braid flipping to the other

side. He saw Zabuza by the fire, and left the comfort of his sleeping roll. With little feet he walked over and sat beside him, this man who was more of a father than his father ever was. He looked down at the metal and tilted his head to the side.

"What is it?" he asked.

His teacher paused in his ministrations and stared at the charm. This close, Haku could see the design on the medal. The raised edges of a fierce shark, its teeth bared and ready, an Oni mask, with jutting teeth and wild eyes, and a mermaid, her tail curled and breasts curtained with long hair, a smile on her face. Each one of them was connected, threaded together with the design of a chain. He was reminded of the akasen girls stories, the ones about the red ribbons of fate. Of course, the chain wasn't like that, but it is what he thought.

"A compass." his teacher said.

It didn't look like a compass, but Haku was not one to question Zabuza-sama.

"What does it find?" he asked instead.

"A girl." the spiky brown haired shinobi told him, his thumb stroking over the smiling Ningyo. His teacher looked at him, away from the medallion, and their eyes met.

"She would like you." he told him, and his curiosity burned.

"Who is she?"

The man remained silent, like he maybe didn't know, but his fingers gripped tighter on the edge of the round ornament.

"Somebody we're going to find." he stated simply. Haku let the quiet reign after that, because the statement warmed his heart. 'We' his master said, not 'I'. Even when they meet the girl, find her again, Haku will be with him.

AN: Some people asked for what the boys were up too! I thought about it a lot, and decided I would put it in here, because they don't quite fit into the story line at the moment. The next story is Why Kisame did the thing he did, and is a bit longer, but I wanted less angst for the moment, and a cute student/teacher piece about these two.

A gigantic thank you to my beta, aturnofthepage. They helped me brainstorm so much for the pieces, and cleaned up my weird use of tenses, which looking back on it, was fucking terrible.

Thanks to the lurkers, readers, reviewers, favoriters, and followers as well. I love you all.

I don't know if it was stated already, but sometimes, if I like the idea is good enough, I do take recommendations for this. There are no guarantees, but this piece is an example of an idea I adored and turned into a fic piece. Everybody thank the random guest who left me this idea!

A Loyal Man's Betrayal

I do not own Naruto.

Not for the first time, Kisame Hoshigaki stared at the un-opened files in front of him.

Somewhere in the damp, darkness of the building, the steady dripping of water off stone sounded. A wet splashing sound, one he had come to understand was the natural background noise of Ame.

A month ago, if someone had told him he would be here, a turncloak in an organization of turn cloaks, he would have beaten them for the insult.

Now, Hoshigaki Kisame knew that life had a funny way of turning things around. Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined it would turn out like this.

He had never thought he would be turned against his own comrades, ordered to take them out for the safety of the village. Never dreamed his own teacher, his trusted sensei, would be a vile traitor, a treacherous, lying snake.

Twice now people close to him had betrayed him and their home. Twice now the disgusting, wretched things known as lies had ruined his life. He was so tired of lies.

He had been offered a way out, though. There was a way to get past these lies, to create a world of truth. The man offered to share it with him, his vision, and a chance to find the one he sought.

It was a dream, but it was one he was willing to work toward. An ultimate goal, something beyond what could be offered to him now. A world where there was no lies, no dishonesty, no treachery. There

would be only truth, and with it, there could be trust. He wanted it with all his being, would do anything to not have to deal with liars.

Only, he thinks he would.

He breathes, and feels the weight of Ryuishi's charm around his neck like a chain tying him down. The gem lying against his skin is a promise, one he is unsure what to think about anymore. A world without lies meant a world without liars. It meant a world without her.

He looks at the files again, untouched since he stole them from the missions office as he fled.

For so long he had planned to find her, to ask her those questions, to force the truth from her. The more he thought about it though, the more he was unsure. Did she even know what the truth was? Was she even stable enough to recognize reality? Did she even know right from wrong?

Kisame wanted to find her, he did, he wanted to be there, to reclaim what had been broken, but the more he thinks about it, the more he thinks that it's impossible.

It has been too long, there's been so much that's happened. No matter what she said or did, no matter what would happen, he wouldn't be able to trust her. He wouldn't know if she was lying, and he isn't sure that she would even know she was doing it.

Kisame had years to think about it since her departure, years to examine when things had started, when she had begun to be so duplicitous. The answer he had found was not a comforting one.

From the first moment he had met her, from the very first conversation they had shared, that girl had been lying. She had told him she was to his face, had stated it loud and clear. Every move she made, every word she spoke, every touch and every strike, she was lying.

It was impossible for her not to, he thought, because there was too many parts of her for them all to be telling the truth. He saw her, saw the splits between them all, the personalities for everyone of them. They were not masks, not carefully created and molded for her use, no, each and every one of them was a piece of her. These were her faces, each one bearing a piece of herself to the world.

He thought she was probably taught it from the moment of her birth. Whores, by trade, were not honest people. They sold the most dangerous kind of lies, the types that had people ruining their lives to please strangers and making plans for women and men they did not know. Whores sold their bodies, yes, but whores sold something more. They sold the lie of love. They sold their company and affection to the highest bidder, acted out whole scenarios and lives for the right price. For enough money, a whore would give themselves up, give the attention their patrons craved, the fantasy life they desired. Ryuishi had known nothing but that life for a very long time.

Still, he wondered. What made her break? What pressure was so great that she could not bare it? Was it something like what the Mist had asked of him? Had she betrayed everything because she had first been betrayed?

His eyes slid over to the files again. He could find out, if he wanted.

Somehow though, it felt like a betrayal of trust. Like he was invading something private if he read through her history like a book. This was personal information, every important scene and life event documented in black and white, contained inside a non-assuming manila folder.

He thought of what she did, of his dreams of a world of truth. He thinks of that world, and how she has no place in it, how that makes something deep in his chest ache. He needs to know.

He reaches out and opens the pages.

A photograph of her registration picture almost makes him put them back down.

Kisame forces himself forward. He glances over the numbers, old statistics that mean almost nothing anymore. The ink glares out at him, stark black against grainy white. It was like time had been halted inside of the envelope. This is where she had been, how her strength was measured out, where she had stood. The numbers where a snapshot of who she was.

He reads further, and even by the first paragraph he is sick.

It is in jargon, all of it written in a sterile and non-personal way. As if it was a mission report instead of a life, but he can decipher it. Kisame understands.

' Object of interest confirmed to have eliminated adult male, twenty eight, while being detained by superior force at the age of four. Neutralization of said male occurred when unwanted advances of a sexual nature toward object of interest without consent proceeded without outside intervention to stop. Autopsy reports confirmed cause of death to be loss of blood and asphyxiation from bite wounds on neck. Bite wounds are a confirmed match for dental records -'

He takes a deep breath, and wants to vomit. He never knew about this. She never said anything, not one word. The information never passed her lips.

Kisame is struck with the sudden urge to find the corpse of whatever sick human did this and kill them all over again. The words in front of him swim inside his head like a disease. He sees ' *age four* ', ' *Unwanted advances of a sexual nature without consent* ', and ' *without outside intervention* ' inside his head like snapshots from a bad dream.

The more he reads, the more disgusted he was. He learned about the plans they had for her, the original ones. How they wanted to turn

her into a honeypot, ignoring her hand-to-hand capabilities and tactical knowledge and instead favoring her conventional '*previously displayed skill at adapting to social situations and stressful environments.*'

He leans in closer, transfixed as he consumes her history.

' Object of interest was unwilling participant of event occurring on the day of Genin Graduation Exam 103, hereby referred to as 'The Massacre'. Object of interest showed obvious distress when entering facility, which was heightened when confronted with remains of previous classmates. Altercation between object of interest and recorded acquaintance, Momochi Zabuza, recorded on tape number 17629 in record hall -'

'- Nominated for graduation. Recommendation based on re-assessment of skills and compatibility with MZ in field training exercises- '

'- unstable emotional and mental state negatable. Elimination reliable if object of interest displays disloyal actions -'

He doesn't know how to feel. All of this, pages and pages of her personal life, and not once do the files ever call her by her name. Not like his do, not like Zabuza's do. It is always 'Object of interest' or her registration number. Has there always been this difference between them, this divide between the three? Is it because of the station of her birth, her lack of a teacher? He has no one to ask, but he suspects he isn't too far from the truth. From the moment she had been born, the moment she had become a kunoichi, the village has seen her as disposable. She was talked about in relation to her connections, how her ability complimented theirs, how she worked well inside the unit.

He reads for hours, every battle they fought, every mission they took. Every squad they outlived was listed, and then he finds it, the last known major event.

' Remains of object of interest's mother found among the debris of said object's residence in the akasen district. Further examination shows rubble and debris to be older than surrounding destruction by forty eight hours. Reports show death was the collateral damage of an altercation between two chunnin, names -'

He stops reading. He knew what happened next, what came after that.

His fist clenches tight around the papers, and he looks back through his memories. Each scene is a little darker, each of her jokes a little more bitter. She was little more than a baby, years younger than them both, but she had been struggling the whole time in silence like she was a woman grown.

Kisame was supposed to be the leader, he was supposed to know what his unit was going through. It was his job to help them, his right to assist them in times of need, but the more he thinks things over, the more he knows she was trying to do the same.

Ryuishi was a liar, through and through, there was little doubt about that. There was something she told him about liars though, somethings he should have remembered. Not even a liar can lie all the time.

He remembers her, standing in his room, crying and smiling. He remembers her little hands running over his face, memorizing his features.

' I love you, ' she told him. She wasn't lying, not then.

It wasn't her place, it shouldn't have been her job to try and lead them. She shouldn't have tried to shoulder it on her own, but all she knew was lying and secrets. It was his job as her leader, and as her friend, to show her another way. To lead her down another path.

Kisame would find her, that he never doubted, but now he knew what to do when he did. He knew what they could be.

When he found her, he would show her the new way, teach her how to shed her liars skin and leave her old ways behind. Like he and the masked man would guide the world and remake it into one of truth, so too would he guide her.

The ache inside his chest finally eases.

AN: So, People wanted to see why Kisame did the thing. The thing he did is here, as for his reasons. It's important to see that Kisame equates honesty with trust as well, and also that he is almost frightening in his dedication to truth.

Thanks to my beta, aturnofthepage, who had to fix so many mistakes in this. Like, so many. Omg, there was all the mistakes.

Thanks to my readers, reviewers, favoiters and followers. You guys are seriously awesome.

The G-String Chronicles (CRACK AU)

I do not Own Naruto. **ALSO THIS IS NON-CANON CRACK.**

I REPEAT, THIS IS NON-CANON CRACK. THIS NEVER HAPPENED. CRACK AU.

OTRATS CRACK AU.

NOT CANON TO STORY.

Nobody knows where or when it all began. The mysterious phenomenon seemed to have just suddenly appeared one day, out of the blue, and like a force of nature, it had left its mark. Men and women would become extra keen when sent out on certain missions, perverts around the Elemental Nations rejoiced, and civilians even caught on to the craze. The lingerie market had never had such high stock prices.

Some experts would argue in darkened bar rooms, about when exactly it had started, or which country could claim the rights of ownership to the fad. Suna nin declared it had begun long ago, with the first Kazekage's wife. Kiri said that it's brothels and working women had started the trend. Kumo and Iwa duked it out for the position of first country to produce a functioning factory. Konoha was quieter than them all, but nobody could ignore that they had the highest number of nin with contraband purchases.

In fact, it may have been a Konoha nin that first noticed.

Intimidating and fierce, Itachi Uchiha had strolled into the the little coastal town in River country, his partner by his side. The sun was shining, the clouds full and lazy as they drifted across the sky. Cicada song filled the humid summer air. The trail had been long and

arduous, filled with misdirection and bad information. It was only through the use of the necklace hanging around the mist shinobi's neck that they had come so far.

(Secretly, his partner had felt... warm knowing that his old friend had given him the key to find her, anywhere she may be.)

The town was a small one, only notable for its distance from all other civilization. The rumors had all pointed here, and he was praying to the old gods that this would be the end of the road. Whoever this woman was, she had a network like none other. Every whore and orphan in the elemental nations had taken one look at his partner and smiled with knowing eyes. They had complimented him and hailed him as a great and tragic hero, dubbing him Chujitsuna Same. His partner had both glowed under the praise and wilted in the realization that his childhood friend's faith in him had never wavered and he could not say the same.

Itachi thought it had been an interesting experience, seeing his partner think so hard, so deeply about someone he had known long ago. The story the brothel mother in Kumo had been both entertaining and informative. He now saw the Rakki Ryuu's disciples everywhere, even in this small town.

A small group of women approaches them, whispering among themselves and giggling. The air around them smells of flowery perfumes and spicy oils. Their fluttering lashes and rouged cheeks give them away almost as much as their scent, and beside him his partner stiffens.

The leader of the group steps forward, a delicate thing with honey hair and amber eyes.

"Rakki Ryuu is here." she whispers from behind her fan, her eyes sparkling, "She doesn't know. We want to surprise her."

More likely is that the group wants to watch the drama unfold, but Itachi has little care either way. They follow the girls back to a

wayward building away from the main streets. It is old and weathered by time, but there is a new coat of paint on it and when they step inside, the floors are fresh and re-finished. The leader shushes the giggling group once more and point the duo to the back door, toward the well garden.

Itachi sees her first.

She is leaning over the edge of the well wall, her body half inside of it. He thinks that if she was as really as good as the rumors say, she would have noticed them right away. Her feet are bare and dirty. Her low hanging black pants look worn and are stained with grout, and his eyes travel upwards to the pair of thin black straps that hang high on her hips and travel downward underneath her belt.

Is that...?

Beside him, his partner swallows.

Itachi glances over and is surprised by the man at his side. The tall figure is noticeably sweating and his small white eyes are locked on the thin black straps, tracing them down the woman's backside. Itachi feels uncomfortable all of a sudden, like he is intruding on a private moment. Perhaps there is more of a history between them than just childhood friends.

The woman straightens and Itachi coldly notes that she isn't wearing a shirt. The mark on her back is clear to see, and the only thing that covers her seems to be a swimsuit top. Itachi feels like smirking, and he steps back into the doorway to observe the reunion from behind a sliding screen. Perhaps the girls watching from their crouched positions at the edge of the stairwell have it right.

Kisame trails his eyes up the line of her back and when she turns around, Itachi is underwhelmed. She is just an average looking kunoichi, her shoulders broader than most, and she is baring a lot of skin, but it isn't anything they haven't seen before.

His partner beside him seems to disagree, and Itachi begins to plot.

Kisame's mouth feels dry, like he has traveled the entire distance of Suna in a single day under that hot sun. He can feel a nervous sweat break out when the woman - *Ryuishi, that's Ryuishi. You know, the girl you fought beside in the war? The one you almost killed after it?* - turns around and familiar coal eyes land on him and light up in recognition. He can see her sharp intake of breath fill her chest and she cocks her hips to the side. His eyes are suddenly glued to the tattoo's on her hips and the strings that wrap around the like arrows pointing him toward-

"Kisame?" a husky voice, and fuck, dammit. Dammit dammit dammit, he isn't a teenager and he shouldn't be acting like this, but her ass is at least a seven on a ten scale and whatever the hell she is wearing underneath her pants keeps drawing his eyes and why isn't she wearing a shirt?

"Ryuishi." He answers, eyes finally meeting hers, and dammit, she's smirking with lips that puberty seems to have filled up like ripened plums.

He tries to fill his head with thoughts of an obnoxious child who always carried food and fought with no shirt but then he is thinking about the rumors that she still does that and-

"I take it this isn't a social call." she says, nodding to his cloak, and shit, this is business isn't it?

He straightens up and tenses.

"Just come with us peacefully." he orders.

She smirks and there is something dancing in her eyes and she slides into stance.

"Kisame, you're gonna learn that it takes some work to make me come." and damn if that isn't the hottest line he has ever heard to

start a fight. Blood lust sings in his veins, accompanied by something that feels kind of like it as well.

The fight is fierce and somewhere halfway through she gets a pack on her back and her meteor hammer in her hands. She leads them away from the tiny village and into the woods. The whole time he can barely take his eyes off that stupid, damnable thing she is wearing. At one point her pants slip down a little further when she is racing towards him in the air and he discovers that the back is nothing but string. His distraction costs him and he ends up in a choke-hold, his neck between her thighs, his face in her crotch, the air beings driven from his lungs, and he thinks he might be okay with dying like this.

Itachi eventually knocks her out with a kunai to the back of the head and just gives him this *look* . The look an overindulgent parent gives their child, or an exasperated friend gives their drunk buddy. He feels like he should be giving the kid that look, not the other way around.

"It wasn't what it looked like, I swear." he says, shamefaced.

Itachi doesn't answer and he spends the whole trip carrying an extra pack with his childhood friend's limp body in his arms, which he is desperately trying not to think about.

When they reach base Itachi practically teleports from his side and he is forced to deliver the package to his boss, their real boss. The masked man gives him a look he can almost feel through the mask, like he knows exactly what happened, and takes the body without a word. The swordsman retreats to his rooms directly afterward to recuperate and definitely not think about his old friend and how she had been able to use a full scorpion kick during the fight.

Itachi, meanwhile, starts a betting pool.

"I'm not sure if I believe this." grumbles out the blond terrorist, his eyes narrowed at the Uchiha.

"I don't know, I think it's possible." Konan replies, idly stirring her tea with chakra. "She did give him the key to finding her."

"That's some fairytale bullshit, that's what that is." spits Hidan, leaning back in his chair, his legs on the tabletop.

"No, no, I don't believe she isn't, like, an actual mermaid or something. No scales? No gills? Didn't the rumors say she was really good in water?" the bomber asks, doggedly pursuing the answer, "Like, totally normal, yeah?"

Itachi nods solemnly.

"I'm betting that she's actually not, like, she has some crazy other form. I bet that they both are gross sea monsters and they make disgusting sea monster babies. Put my money on that, un." he says, placing a bag of coins on the table.

"I bet she joins, but she doesn't sleep with our local mist shinobi." Konan says, placing another bet on the table.

Hidan slaps down an overflowing purse as well, grinning like a maniac.

"I bet that we find them fucking bumping uglies in six months, top" he declares. Itachi procures his buy in from his sleeve and places it with the rest.

"I bet it ends badly." he says.

Kisame rolls over, warm and rested. Something next to him grunts and wriggles closer, snaking a hand onto his chest. His eyes snap open and he grabs the offending appendage, flipping the intruder underneath him and pinning their arm to their back. He leans over them, pushing their arm up and letting them support his weight. A whimper sounds through the morning air and a waterfall of black hair falls against his sheets.

"Kisame!" a familiar voice protests, muffled by the pillow their face is shoved into.

"Ryuishi?" he mumbles, blinking the sleep from his eyes.

"Yes!" she shouts into feather down

"Are you in my bed?"

"Yes!"

"Are you wearing my shirt?" he grumbles out, squinting at the pool of fabric slipping down her spine.

"Yes."

He feels the slide of smooth legs against his and he is suddenly alert for a whole different reason.

"Are you wearing pants?" he whispers, alarmed, and dismayed.

"... No?" she answers, her voice unsure. As if she forgot if she was wearing pants or not.

"Please tell me you're joking right now." he groans, slumping.

"I don't want to talk about my pants or lack thereof until your morning wood is someplace other than my thigh Kisame."

Panicked, he shoves her away and sends her tumbling off the bed with a yelp. Standing, her back to him, she ruffles her hair.

"I'm going to eat breakfast and pretend this didn't happen." she intones darkly, walking to the door in a rushed pace. As she exits, Kisame spies a flash of black strings around her hips and a full, round cheek before she pulls his shirt down.

She didn't even put pants on.

He groans and flops back down, regretting the nights the trio had shared bedrolls in their youth. Why did she think it was okay to do the same years later? What could have possibly made her think that it would be safe?

Movement catches his eyes and he turns his gaze to the bed beside his, where Itachi is sitting up and staring at him with a blank face.

He wants to die.

He should have known better to bring her here, it's all her fault that his partner is looking at him like that.

Her and that stupid G-string.

AU: AGAIN THIS IS NON CANON CRACK. THIS IS NOT PART OF THE STORY. THIS IS AN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE CRACK. Please enjoy.

Also, thank you to aturnofthepage for editing this. I also want to apologize for writing this, but there was a prompt, and this happened and it spiraled out of control. I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry for writing this garbage.

Sorry for this crack. This NON-CANON CRACK. OTRATS CRACK AU.

Genetic Donor

I do not own Naruto.

The search begins for Watanabe Ryuishi's father begins before the child is even born. Three months before, to be exact, after every attempt of purging the child from Keiko's womb fails.

In Kirigakure, and most of Water Country, there is a certain etiquette to being a whore. Most women see more men in a month than most will in their lives in Kagami's brothel, and she has learned the unsaid rules well. The first rule is that after money has exchanged hands and the deed has been done, the contract is over. Unless there is more money exchanged, and further agreements made, customer and service provider never see each other again. Second is that any act performed not agreed to beforehand will nullify said contract, and the customer will be handled by security. Third rule is that no unpleasant surprises will occur after the contract has been completed for either person(s) in the form of disease or offspring. These were just the main staples, and there were many more rules gone unsaid.

Keiko's rounded belly is proof that the system does not always work.

Kagami blames the quality of contraceptives at the time. There had been a steady provider for the Okiya who had quite suddenly, stopped supplying to Water Country due to some insult or slight. It had left Kagami scrambling for another supplier, and at such short notice, the quality of the product she had found may have been lacking somewhat. It mostly worked though, and only four girls saw the repercussions of the low quality prophylactics before Kagami could rectify the problem. Three of which became pregnant, and one of which contracted a sexually transmitted infection that put her out of work for two months before she was cleared for duty again. Two of

those pregnancies were easily terminated with bitter root tea, and the girls rested a bit before returning to work.

Keiko, the third pregnancy, remained with child, even after two more attempts.

Taking it as a sign that the child was meant to be, Kagami set to work informing everybody of such. She also began looking through the client records of the estimated insemination time, following one of those unspoken rules. It didn't really matter who fathered the child to her, but to others it might. It was proper procedure to check if the child was offspring of civilian or shinobi.

If it was civilian, the matter would be dropped. Kagami had no qualms about hiding the existence of a child from someone who never wanted one.

However, if they were a shinobi-well, it was all a matter if they were clan shinobi or not. If they did come from a clan, then by proxy, the child was also property of that clan. Most bastard children would be assimilated into the lower ranks and shamed for existing, but they belonged to the blood either way.

If it was a non-clan shinobi, then they would politely be informed of the accident. The shinobi could choose to take the child with or without consent of the mother, or they could ignore its existence. If they chose the later though, said child would be watched for possible potential for the Academy by infrequent, casual visits by ninja. The blood of shinobi could win out, even if it was watered down and diluted by civilian genes.

Kagami and Keiko scanned over the records for potential candidates. They narrowed down the conception time to a week long period, using Keiko's magnificently well kept records of her monthly visitor and fertile days.

In that week alone, Keiko entertained somewhere around twenty-one customers, five of which could be immediately excluded due to

gender, six of which were disqualified due to the type of services rendered, and seven of which were civilians, and therefore, did not matter.

Which left three candidates for the paternity of the child. None of them clan, and two of them only sporadic visitors. It was decided that they would wait and see if the child was even born alive that they would inform the candidates.

The moment it was born, and its body was washed clean, the paternity boiled down to one. The fair skin and lighter features of the other two did not match the tanned child in front of her.

After emerging from her scrolls, Kagami discreetly contacted her informants in the shinobi forces to look for one 'Sato Takeishi'. Only, no such man existed. Even after she provided a physical description- *tall, dark skin, strange eyes, and a tattoo on his forearm* -no one was ever found.

Having done her duty to the best of her ability, Kagami gave up the search. It did not matter to her whether or not the man was ever found. Keiko, in something like sentimentality, gave the child her family name and placed the character for stone in her name. 'Ryuu' so she would remember the strength of flowing water, and 'Ishi', after her mysterious father.

The topic would not come up again for twelve years, when a man with golden eyes and a gilded tongue came asking questions.

It was the natural course to take, when researching an unknown chakra trait, to ask questions of parentage. So it was when one Watanabe Ryuishi came under his care.

For a long while, he would not believe the stories the girl told him of death, rebirth, and the all-encompassing Void. It was too outlandish, too preposterous, and not defensible or able to be proven in any way. Thus, he suspected it was a mutation or a hitherto unknown

Kekkei Genkai. He took samples of her blood, bone marrow, hair, chakra, saliva, and her spinal fluid in an attempt to figure out the strange taint in her chakra and the infection in her gates.

He also questioned her paternity. The results of which revealed one parent to be deceased and the other a complete unknown.

"The man who knocked up Keiko was nothing more than a sperm donor," the girl-woman explained carelessly after an intense round of training one day, "He wasn't there for anything, and he might have not even known I was existed. Keiko banged dudes all the time, it was literally her job."

"You sound like you do not care for either parent," he had rasped, reading the bitterness under her flippancy.

She shrugged, then winced at the pain it jolted down her spine from an earlier blow. "Keiko was distant, and she tried, but she was more enamored with the idea of having a daughter than being a good mother. She was more of a distant older sibling figure if anything. I cared for her, and her death was what finally made me break, but the sperm donor? I couldn't give any less of a fuck. I had good parents, Orochimaru, just not in this life."

He understood the logic, and let the subject change naturally, his golden eyes calculating. If she did not know, the Matron might.

Which is how he found himself drinking tea in front of a retired Kiri seduction agent. He admired the skill the woman must have had to live long enough to be discarded from the corp. It was not an easy thing, infiltration and sabotage, and he appreciated the skill it took.

"Why does it matter?" the woman, seemingly calm as still water, asked him. He knew that she was tense, that just beneath that placid surface a strong current ran.

"It has to do with the health of the girl. Her parentage could be... aggravating the trauma in ways. Some bloodlines can be susceptible

to such things," he said, in a mix of half truth and half lie.

The woman frowned, and knew she was being milked for information. She was not an idiot, yet the note he carried was in Watanabe's sloppy handwriting, and sealed with the girl's perfume. More than that, it was written with the absolute rudeness and crass personality of the child, and stained with the same color of lipstick Kagami knew the child had come to use. A mockery of a kiss stained the corner of the page, in a vivid plum-berry color.

"Keiko came from an older civilian family. Raised in this sort of business, likely the kind of girl who had been hoping for Geisha but settled for escort. Her father was narrowed down to a few aspects, but with her skin tone and eye shape, hair texture, and later, body type, we narrowed it down. Used the name 'Sato Takeishi', but that is about as real as the Mizukage's benevolence," the steely woman said.

He asked more questions, about the man, about her research, and the suspicions the matron held. She was certain he was a shinobi, but he only ever visited three times before he disappeared. He was ignorant to the child, and she never felt that strangeness in him that she could often feel in Ryuishi.

He retains his interest in the child's genetics long after she moves away and begins her own purpose. The taint in her chakra holds his curiosity, but when he is inducted into a criminal organization and begins creating his own footholds in the Elemental Nations, it burns low and quiet in the back of his mind.

That is, until he is grouped around his colleagues for the first time. The organization is not complete, and there are spots empty, but there is one who catches his attention. It is not for his functional immortality, which is crude and subject to failure, incorporating far too many weaknesses for Orochimaru's tastes. No, it is for the familiar shape of his narrow slanted eyes, which stare out from above his mask. They are similar, near perfect replicas of eyes with coal black irises that looked at him not to long ago.

Orochimaru pays a little more attention than necessary to the Akatsuki treasurer. He does not follow him, no, but he does... *observe* him, time to time. While he does not gain irrefutable evidence, there is a growing list of similarities.

His hair, for one, while not the correct shade, is the same lightly volumized and wavy texture as his young partner's. He finds this out when collecting a bounty with the man, and the shinobi uses a Fuuton jutsu, blowing the mask and cap away.

He finds in that same instance that the bridge and shape of the nose are fairly similar, as well as the general shape of the face. His young protégé had more a more feminine countenance, with fuller lips and a less square chin, but there is a resemblance, to be sure.

The vindictiveness is parallel as well, when the bronze-skinned criminal makes that same shinobi pay for the Fuuton jutsu ten times over. He is vindictive when he makes the man scream, and spiteful when he waits until that screaming is raw and throaty before ending his life.

The way the man sometimes leans back in his chair, two legs off the ground, and watches others with those narrow, almond-shaped eyes. Not speaking, just observing. Distant, remote, and familiar.

He does not discover what the Taki-nin's original chakra nature is, nor does he truly see him in full. An examination would be denied and he is not a fool to request such a thing, even if the rudimentary stitches holding the nin together and the five hearts are mildly intriguing. There is no way to procure a DNA sample for comparison, either. At least, not for a long time.

Orochimaru weighs the options, carefully selecting one that will benefit him the most. Though it is a long option, he takes it. He bides his time, and he waits.

When members awaiting recruitment become a conversation, he waits for her name. It is mentioned passingly, as an option. The girl's

old teammate stiffens in response and whirls on the leader, his jaw tight and teeth bared. Orochimaru is long practiced in smothering the scorn he feels, but it tests him to see such a reaction. The girl had slaved away, making a kingdom and building an empire, and the boy hated her for it, even though she gave him the option to build it with her.

As the one with the most comprehensive information network, Orochimaru is selected to compile a dossier with Sasori on 'The Kiri no Ningyo'. He is pleased that her status as Rakki Ryuu remains hidden from them, and sets to work. For all the world he appears driven, but he is as deceptive as she. Her file says nothing and little more, mentioning areas he knows she does not tread and professing skills long outdated and surpassed.

Details of unimportant things slip through. Things like deceased mothers and a photograph of poor quality and a few years out of date. The swordsman stares at it for a long, long while, but that does not interest him.

The fact that the treasurer stares at the mother's name and the photo with narrowed eyes, however, interests him greatly.

The first time Kakuzu takes note of the child's existence, it is not for any other reason than that she has a surprisingly high bounty.

He is flipping through bingo books, taking note of updated values and new faces. Pages scrape quietly against one another, and he takes his time reading each graph and set of habits. First is the newest print from Iwa, which mentions an unsurprising and uninteresting few. The next that comes is from Kumo, where Sharingan Kakashi has been bumped up in price yet again. The third is from Kiri, and he nearly skips it.

The reason is that, glancing over the page, there is nothing there but a small child that can be nothing more than a genin. Kunai fodder,

and more trouble than it's worth. He reads a few more pages before his brow furrows and he thumbs back to her page.

It turns out, for that price, the trouble is more than worth it.

He sets to memorizing the page. Kirigakure kunoichi, graduated in the Bloody Mist. Actually a chuunin, which is impressive. Unsaid treason, which is vague, but understandable. Strengths, weaknesses, known relationships, interests. Combat experience, frontline experience-

His eyes flick up to the base statistics again. Age eleven. Eleven...

Those same acid green and scarlet eyes slide over to the provided picture again. It's a three quarter body shot, and the first thing he notices is the stockiness of it. It's an identification photo, taken every year after becoming a shinobi. The background is the standard white-beige that comes with mass-produced photography.

The second thing he notices is the unimpressed glare she is leveling at the camera. There is something familiar in the shape of her cold black eyes and of her nose.

Her skin also throws him. Kiri inhabitants tend to be chalky and pale like milk, not tan that looks like it would deepen in the sun. She looks like the small children he remembers from years and years ago. The ones that ran on the streets and played in the rivers of Takigakure. Otters, the whole lot of them, living half in and out of the water, burned butterscotch and bronze by the sun and languid and comfortable in the wet heat of Waterfall, untouched by the warring clans.

The girl stares out, unimpressed, and he checks her birth date. October tenth. Where was he, eleven years ago?

Somewhere in Water Country, collecting a bounty.

He closes the book and slides it away from him. The chance is infinitesimal. There is no need to think on such things, and if he waits, the girl's bounty will only get bigger. If she escaped the hellhole that was Kiri, she would do just fine escaping the lower level bounty hunters. He need not get involved until later, when he could gain the most profit for the least amount of energy.

Five years later, it comes up again. The girl has made a frightening name for herself, and bounty hunters are warned about the Kiri no Ningyo. She is hell to track, flitting around like a ghost. No one seems to see her or know when she crops up, not the lowest gutter orphan with eel bones in his hair, or the most well connected spymaster, who gathers information from all around. Some teams have gone after her, and they have only re-appeared as heads, brought in for their own bounties. She's a killer, she is cruel, she is powerful.

The Akatsuki are interested. A file is made, a file that lists her deceased mother's name. Watanabe Keiko is familiar sounding, and he stares at the characters on the page for a long while. It can't be. It couldn't have been.

He looks at the newest photograph. It is grainy and poorly lit, but that face stands out, familiar like the one he sees in the mirror. She is fourteen or fifteen here, and the picture is old, but the changes of adolescence are showing though, and they look like that of a Takigakure native.

They look like him.

He looks at the file and the photo for a long time. Almost as long as the swordsman.

In the end, it matters little. They decide against her suddenly, but are told to keep tabs if they can. Right now she is too unstable, too hard to track, and insulated by an unseen third party. Later, she may be of use.

The photograph disappears, alongside the file. It does not matter, the memory of it is burned into his head. He does not want to admit the possibility of a mistake. He knows nothing but cold facts about this... girl? Woman? *Kunoichi*, yes, *that's better* . It matters nothing to him that she favors a mid to long range weapon so like his thread, or that there is strength in her body, enough to wipe out teams of hunters. It is nothing that a swordsman stares at a stolen photograph when it is late and he thinks no one is around. It is worthless to wonder is she is like those children, those otters who lived half in and half out of the rivers, useless to remember they call her Ningyo.

Her early life means nothing to him, and he feels apathetic about the possibility. He tells himself this again and again, then looks her up in the most recent release of the bingo book. Her price has risen again, and maybe he will attempt to claim it soon.

Soon, but not quite yet.

AN: Spaghetti grandpa, old as balls, done made a mistake. A living mistake. He is now Spaghetti dad. That being said I thought this was more of a 'fun fact' than an actual important detail. I don't know if it will ever come up in canon or be important if it does. That being said I did plan on him being the sperm donor for a long time. Surprise!

Shout out to enbi for going above and beyond and editing this when she usually only does OTRATS. Bless her.

Bunk-Mates

I do not own Naruto. Uncontrollable fluff.

In both her lives, Ryuishi Watanabe has always been a physical person. To her, speaking without moving is unthinkable, half of communication is body language for a reason. Touch is something she has always relied on to convey meaning, to gain understanding, and to simply *feel* .

Even now she does it, gesturing with her hands, pacing, or fiddling with her clothes. She expresses what she wants with her body, be it anger or sadness, love or hate. With fists and fingers, she tells a story, her own.

It doesn't stop there either. Touch is something she craves. She relishes the feel of pressure against her skin. She finds contentment and joy when people reciprocate and respond, by playing with her hair or embracing her, holding her hand, or resting against her.

She admits that it may be tainted a little with all the trauma inside her head. Admittedly, sometimes when people go to touch her she expects to be struck or touched inappropriately. She flinches, or reels back, dodges blows that aren't coming from her. It makes her angry, at herself, because to her, touch was always meant to express. It is one of her greatest joys and comforts.

It stands to reason then, that being such a physical person, that she likes companionship in almost all matters. Including sleep.

She won't lie and say she doesn't enjoy stretching out and relishing in her own bed, but she also won't deny that she is, in fact, the biggest fucking cuddler. It's a thing. It happens.

She just never realized that it would say so many things to so many people.

Zabuza is halfway to falling asleep in the safe house near the border when his door creaks open. After weeks spent battling through mud and straining against the frigid temperatures, he is beyond tired. Not that he would ever say it aloud of course.

So when he hears the squeak of hinges, he is mildly enraged, ready to curse whoever is bothering him and maybe skewer them with the sword laid next to him. He will make it quick and clean only because he wants to sleep, and it is a hard thing to do these days.

He turns his head, ready to reprimand whoever it is, but stops when he spies the small form of his partner shutting the door behind her.

"I'm sleeping with you. My room is too cold," she informs him quietly.

He grunts, pleased. Ever since the incident with the erection, they haven't shared a bed as often. He finds it strange, because she was the one who informed him it was perfectly natural, but he had accepted the loss like a true shinobi. Not once had he complained.

It seemed his stoicism paid off, because some nights, like tonight, she would return.

He hears her pad silently over the floors, her little feet quickly stepping towards the bed. Soon enough the covers over him shift and he can feel the cold night air against him as she slides beneath the blankets.

She breathes out, and the gust of tepid air brushes against his throat as she wriggles closer. An icy arm is thrown over his chest, and the frigid limb makes him shiver just once. His tool is always cold for some reason, but he is more than glad to provide her warmth.

Her chilly leg slides over his and he feels the glacier like appendage that is her foot touch him. He crushes a yelp in his chest and grits his teeth, baring with it. The feel of her face burrowing against his shoulder and the smell of saltwater and pear blossoms is enough of a payment for him.

"Thanks Zabuza," she whispers, and he can feel her lips moving against him. He grits his teeth, demanding that his body get under control and not flush. That it never flush again. He is a shinobi, and shinobi do not blush when their tools make intelligent decisions like pooling body heat on a cold night. It's just logical. If anything they should be rewarded for such a wise choice.

He feels something inside his stomach flutter as her breathing evens out, and thinks that he likes her like this, quiet and calm at his side. He likes that she will risk waking to another unfortunate incident just to be here.

It tells him that she likes to be near him as much as he likes to be near her.

Kisame doesn't get much of a say on nights like these. He has learned over time that fighting against the pajama clad girl is about ten times the trouble of just letting her get what she wants.

He sees the swish of a braid in the moonlight illuminating the barrack room, and hears the quick intake of breaths. He knows the moment she crawls into the bed she will wrap her arms around his neck in the most uncomfortable way imaginable and bury her face in his collar bone.

This time is no different and she sneaks across his room like an enemy is watching her, and scrambles up into his bed. In seconds she has him locked in an embrace, and he sighs as he lifts an arm to rub her back.

The youngest member of his unit shivers as she practically lays on top of him, and he knows that while she may be cool, her shaking is not from the cold. Ever since they joined the front-lines she has visited sporadically in the night.

She breathes out, and he can feel the bandages on her shin below his knee. He knows this one will scar, and for a moment he feels guilt. The Suna kunoichi should have never gotten close enough to do the damage she did, but Kisame had been busy taking out a puppeteer, and Zabuza had been similarly occupied half way across the battlefield. The blond woman had managed to dodge the girl's weapon and slide under her defense enough to do some serious damage. They're all lucky that Ryuishi was flexible enough to raise her leg that high. The sai could have just as easily sliced through her gut.

"Sorry," she mumbles into his collar, and he huffs out a breath. At this point, there isn't really a need for apologies anymore.

"Squad Eleven again?" he asks, and the girl nods, her soft hair brushing against his chest.

He hums, and continues to rub circles against her back, his eyes staring at the moonlight pouring through his window. It's weak and fading, and he guesses it makes sense. She always gets more terrors when there is nothing in the night sky.

"You're the best Kisame." she tells him sleepily, and his chest aches with warmth at her words. He knows the affection he holds is more than professional, but he doesn't really care. It's hard too when she shows him how much she thinks of him when she comes here.

It tells him that he makes her feel safe.

The first time the woman-child tries to clamber in his quarters, he throws her out like a dog, grabbed around the nape of her neck and tossed indignantly out of the room. He finds her curled up in an

alcove, surrounded on all sides by sturdy stone walls, the entrance trapped and secured.

The second time he sneers disdainfully until her muted sense of shame burns on her tan cheeks and she walks away herself. She serves him breakfast the next day without looking him in the eyes.

The third time he summons a horde of snakes to chase her. He discovers that, somehow, she has caught every single one of them a meal and bribed them into wrapping around her. He finds her still sleeping form, limbs weighed down by pythons and hair tangled with vipers, on the ground in the kitchens.

The fourth time she comes to him at night, she presents a ten page thesis paper on her reasons, the benefits of the arrangement, and the possible downsides, along with an additional few pages of graphs and previously documented studies from books in the labs.

Then she slips under his sheets before he can finish reading it.

As a legendary and feared criminal, the behavior may come as a bit of a surprise. They both know she is not the child her body appears to be, and there is no implicit reason for her to be doing so. Then again, he is consistently mildly amused and surprised by her treatment of him. Half of the time she treats him like he is something to be wary of, and the other half she treats him like a close and personal friend. The only reason he allows her there that night is because she never fails to treat him with respect and acknowledgement.

"Your hypothesis is weak and your personal reasoning means little to me." he tells her, wryly amused at the way she has covered herself, head to toe, in his blankets.

"My data is more than sufficient to backup my hypothesis, even though the wording of it may need some work." she answers back. He can hear the weariness in her voice. Training may have been a little harder for her today, but he only accepts the best.

He hums out his acquiescence.

"Also, my vivid hallucination inducing fitful sleep and insomnia should pertain to you as my health care professional, not to mention the comfort of social contact lessening the symptoms of my PTSD." she argues further, her voice muffled by the pillow she has her face pushed into.

"That may be true, but I was speaking of the third paragraph on page eight. I have no need to know what your teammates and you did previously."

"You do if you want to strengthen the positive reactions and treatment. I related it back to Pavlovian training in the next paragraph." she answers.

He hums again, his eyes darting over the said writing. He would have liked to have read the books she claims to have, or absorbed half the knowledge she had access to in that world she says she came from. Imagine, a world with scholarly pursuits of science within the law. No discrimination for his curiosity, only several paths to satisfy it. Fourteen years of education she claimed, and she said there were many more available. The things he could have done...

"Very well." he tells her, and something in the linen wrapped lump relaxes as the woman-child scoots closer. Neither of them are very warm, but as he extinguishes the light he feels there is something gratifying about the way her small body curls against his side. There is something to be said for physical contact alone.

Her persistence and willingness is soothing in a way he will deny for a very long time.

It tells him he is accepted and, in a way, cared about.

Naruto was alone for a very long time.

For him, it seemed like he was alone forever! He didn't know why, but nobody liked him. They didn't like hearing him, or seeing him, and they said mean stuff about him all the time. It made him sad, and hurt, and angry. Most of all though, he felt lonely.

Then, one day, the best thing ever happened. He found a garbage fairy! She was dirty and smelly, but she looked at him, and she didn't flinch, or yell, or anything. She just treated him like a person.

So he took her home, and then she showered. She played with him, and made him the best dinner ever! Okay, maybe it wasn't as good as ramen, but she cooked it right there and even the vegetables didn't taste that gross. She told him that she didn't care about monsters, or demons, or anything like that. She said she had even been friends with two of them!

The best part was, she let him call her Nee-chan. He was sunshine, and she was his big sister.

Once, when she came over, they built a big tent in the living room out of blankets. It was his castle, and they protected it from bad guys and a huge monster, but then the monster they fought turned out to be okay and they all sat down and ate another big meal that tasted awesome but was called something weird.

They played in the tent all day, and Naruto learned how to count a little bit with the 'Uno' game. Seeing the numbers in action and having Nee-chan there to help him made it a lot easier. It was so much fun.

At night, Nee-chan dragged out a whole bunch of blankets and pillows from his room and her magical, super heavy back-pack. They put them inside the tent, and they made a huge bed. After his bath, he laid down in the dark, and she sang to him. Her voice was all soft, and quiet. and calm, and he didn't know the song, but the words sounded so pretty. She wrapped the blanket around him and he wrapped his arms around her, his head resting on her belly.

Her hands ran through his hair, and her voice made him sleepy. He could hear her heart beating somewhere above him, steady and calm.

He was happy. He was so happy, because this, this is what he had always wanted. To be accepted and to be noticed.

Naruto had never had a mom or a dad. He had no blood family like the kids he saw on the streets, but that didn't mean anything. When Nee-chan came in, he knew everything had changed.

When she tucks him in and he falls asleep next to her, it tells him what he needs to know.

It tells him he has family.

Gaara doesn't sleep. He knows most people do, and he's tried a couple time, but it never seems to work for him. He always wakes up feeling... different. The whispers inside his head are louder, almost making words, and it makes makes it feel too full. His honorable father is always standing over him when he wakes up, looking haggard and disappointed.

The look makes him... cold. He thinks that's the word.

Gaara does get tired though, but because he can't sleep, he does something else. He lets his head go quiet, and he just....drifts. He doesn't think, and he doesn't move. It's not sleeping, not really, but he isn't awake either.

He doesn't like it though, because it's hard to drift when things are moving, or when people talk. It's easy to drift when he's bored, or when nothing keeps him moving. He can't drift when he wants to, and sometimes he drifts without meaning to at all.

That is, he never used to be able to drift when he wanted.

Then, Aneue came to Sunagakure, and everything changed.

Aneue plays with him, and she eats, and she laughs, and she says bad words. She touches him, and carries him, and she scolds him when he is bad. When she is around, the whispers quiet, and he feels his chest fill up like he just breathed in. When she touches him, his sand feels cooler where her skin was, and when she ruffles his hair, his head tingles like there are scorpions in it. Good scorpions.

He likes her candy, and her smiles, and her kisses, even when she makes them loud and all over his face.

His favorite thing about Aneue though, is that she sings.

She sings, and some of the words are just sounds, and sometimes they mean things. Whatever music come out though, he can feel it. He can feel it like a full stomach, or a nip on the tongue, or the sun on his head.

He feels the song. Her voice sounds like smoke and honey, and he feels it in his heart when she sings.

When she holds him, and she sings, he drifts and he feels it. He lets the noise carry him, lets himself feel the pressure of her touch and the coolness of her skin through his shell. He drifts so hard, it almost feels like sleep, but when he wakes up, there is aneue instead of father and his head doesn't hurt. She curls around him, asleep of awake, like his sand.

He listens, and held tight and safe, he hears what it her song says, what the drifting says.

He listens, and it tells him he is loved.

Ryuishi will never know the full extent of what her physical affection mean to everybody. Sure, she'll figure out a few, but most will remain in the hearts of those who have been graced to be her bunk-mates.

The collection will grow with time, and many will see it as sort of a gesture of favor. If Watanabe Ryuishi likes somebody, if she trusts somebody, if she damn well pleases, she's going to hop into bed and twine her limbs with theirs. She'll steal your pillows, or use your body like one. She'll wrap herself in borrowed sheets and stolen warmth, and she will be there, an unforgettable presence that says something.

It doesn't say the same thing to everybody, and sometimes it does even say the same thing all the time, but no matter what, her bunk-mates know that it will always tell them something.

AN: So, sort of a fluff piece. Mostly just some opinions on what Ryuishi gives to people without meaning too, and how it's part of her charm. Also, how she is physically hungry for touch, and she knows this. I feel, eh, about this? But it was warm and fuzzy and stuff. Fluff. Affections.

It's half beta'd by aturnofthepage, so bless them. I then added more afterwards, and wanted to post this. So all mistakes are mine.

I also am loosing some steam so, eh.

Thanks for reading, as always. Bless you guys.

Days Gone By

I don't own Naruto.

The silver blade flashes in the dim illumination of the concrete room. Light pools over the length of high quality steel, collecting in its imperfections. Hairline fractures stand out, dark and gloomy against the mirror like polish, and chips mar the smooth surface.

"One day," Kisame drawls, hunched over his katana, "Chips and cracks in a blade will no longer be a problem for me."

There is a grunt of agreement from his side, where Zabuza hones his own tachi, carefully working the edge down to a scalpel like sharpness. His focus on the task is a little bit worrying, but as it is one of his self proclaimed favorite things to do, nobody says anything.

"Samehada can regrow her scales, not that I've ever seen a lesser weapon take one off," he says casually, his beady eyes inspecting a chip near the hilt. Some stupid Doton technique from an Iwa nin. He's glad the man is dead by his hand.

"Kubikiribocho can regrow if fed blood," the spiky haired boy contributes, his voice gravelly. Puberty is doing strange things to that twelve year old, Kisame thinks. His voice is deepening, sure, but it also sounds like he swallowed rocks.

"It still breaks," the blue haired teen reminds the younger boy.

There is a grunt, then the sound of a whetstone sliding down steel. A short silence follows.

"Kubikiribocho is bigger," the masked adolescent contributes.

"Kubikiribocho is *longer*," Kisame corrects, "Samehada has more weight and girth."

"Samehada bends weird," the younger male points out, as if a flexible sword is wrong and against nature. In his mind it is.

"It can reach places better that way. Unlike Kubikiribocho, which is just a-"

"I can no longer tell if you two are talking about swords or dicks," interrupts a husky voice, smoothing out with age.

Kisame turns around to the girl lying on her belly on the bed. Her long, braided hair drapes over the pillows and he knows later they will smell like sea water and flowers.

"I thought you were asleep," he comments lightly.

"I was trying, but some genius guys started comparing dongs not two feet away from me," she whines. Kisame snorts and nudges her with his elbow. She always gets irritated when she's tired.

"Is the little Ningyo grumpy?" he croons in a patronizing voice. She groans dramatically and twists the blankets around her tighter, squeezing her closed eyes shut just a bit harder as if it will keep the noise out.

"I'm cold, and tired of hearing you two go on about the gigantic weapons you'll inherit that double as masculine fertility symbols," she grumbles, her words muffled by the thin sheets.

Zabuza grunts and kicks off his shoes, moving up onto the bed a bit more. She makes some noise of protest as he scoots to place his back against the wall, forcing her to curl up to avoid him, but quickly changes her mind when his toasty warm legs stretch out again. She hums happily inside her throat, and flops her head on his lap. Kisame is struck by how much it sounds like a pur.

He grins to himself and lets his own upper body fall across her outstretched legs. He can feel the coolness of the blankets, which is frankly a relief. The room is sweltering, and she always seems to be at the correct temperature.

"I would be mad that your fat body is crushing my legs," she murmurs sleepily, "But you are incredibly warm."

"Not fat," he informs her.

"Built like a brick house body didn't fit as well," she snarks back, attempting to smother herself in Zabuza's thigh. She hates the cold, and nothing is colder than February in Water Country. Outside the outpost walls there is at least two feet of snow, and an ice storm struck not a week and a half ago. The temperature has remained too low for it all to melt, and she is miserable in this climate. They can't light fires, lest they draw enemy attention, and none of her jackets survived the battlefields. Ryuishi can barely step outside without becoming a shivering mess, and inside is little better.

The outposts along the frontlines are full of concrete walls that eat heat and destroy it, and if there is any hint of moisture it freezes as well. There may not be a wind chill, but she can see her breath mist at night. She just isn't built for this.

The ten year old is just glad that she has Kisame and Zabuza, because without her gigantic, living heaters she would be dead. A frozen block of ice. She has no idea how they just go on like a pair of arctic creatures, but she doesn't care as long as she can leech their heat.

The sound of weapons being sharpened lulls her back to sleep once more. It's more of a light doze than anything, but this is a calm in between battles, when the Kaijuu No Kiri are allowed to rest instead of rampage. It's nice hanging in the outpost with her unit, she likes it.

What she doesn't like is the wary eyes of the squads the village places them with. After squad eleven fell, they never got re-homed

and bounced around where they were needed. At first, everyone had looked down on the young unit, sneering and judgemental. Freaks and brats, that's what they thought.

Then they saw them on the field.

She doesn't know when, exactly, they started harmonizing attack patterns subconsciously. Or when they started rampaging like a beast with one body. It doesn't matter anymore, not really. They do well together. They come, they destroy, they leave.

In the eyes of others though, they are monsters wearing human skins. Kisame is their task master, and she and Zabuza are his demonic disciples.

She probably likes that rumor a little more than she should.

The sound of Zabuza sharpening his sword stops, and he shifts for a moment, wiping it clean and placing it in his scabbard. She keeps dozing until she feels her hair shift around, somebody untying the end of her braid.

She cracks one eye open, but all she can see is the fabric of his pants and his stomach. That boy is going to get frostbite one of these days, she just knows it.

"The fuck do you think you're doing?" she huffs out.

"Weapon maintenance," he grunts out, undoing her braid. She frowns at his words, but she allows him to play with her raven locks. He really is a tactile oriented person, always sharpening his weapons and fiddling with kunai. She guesses her hair counts, in a way. It does have barbed wire in it.

She closes her eyes and enjoys it for a second, luxuriating in the feel of his fingers working out the knots, gentling untangling the snags in the strands with surprising gentleness. She feels safe, surrounded

by them both. The sharp tang of ocean brines that is Kisame, and the musk of weapons oil that lingers around Zabuza-

Her eyes snap back open.

"Kisame, does he have oil on his hands?"

"You have eyes, you look."

"All I can see is Zabuza's incredibly stupid gut, bulging out from eating all of my jerky."

" *Our* jerky," Kisame reprimands.

"For fucks sake. Does he, or does he not have oil on his hands?" she snaps out.

She hears a put upon sigh, and feels more shifting on her legs as the oldest of them tears his attention away from his weapon and examines Zabuza's hands.

"No," he answers, "But you're right, he should probably lay off the jerky."

There is a defensive grunt and Zabuza tugs on her hair, making her scalp stretch. She hisses like a snake, indignant at the treatment. They don't actually mean it. If anything, they could all stand to eat more.

"Teasing, Zabuza," she keens, wriggling across his legs in an attempt to ease her suffering, "We're not actually insulting you. This is friendly teasing."

The hold remains for a moment longer, a lingering threat, before it releases. She slumps across his legs as adrenaline wakes her up fully. No use sleeping now.

A hand cards through her hair like a pet owner soothing an animal, and even though she hates that it does, it totally fucking works.

"I would fight you," she grumbles, "But I don't want to wrestle when Kisame has a sword on the bed."

Said teenager snorts at the excuse, and she shifts her heel underneath him so it digs into his ribs. He deserves it. He made a jerky comment too.

"You'll get yours Kisame," she growls, "Karma is going to get you."

He forces her foot to lie flat with an errant hand and brute strength. Maybe she should eat more of her own food, because obviously these two are reaping some benefits from it. They can wrestle grown ass men already, and they're shooting up like kelp. It's like a centimeter each fucking day.

"Yah? How so?" he asks.

"Inopportune boners," she assures him, "Important mission assignment? Boner. Just walking through the street? Boner. In the middle of a fight? Boner."

"You said that was natural," he grunts, his face staining a darker blue grey.

"It is a natural reaction to adrenaline at times. It's also karma because you let me take the hit on this one," she explains, "And also because you pick the crab legs out of the seafood sukiyaki and leave none for the rest of us."

"Yah? Well you spend forever each morning in the bathroom, and you have no respect for your superiors," the teenager reprimands.

She hums in her throat. There's no point in denying it. They all know it's absolutely true.

"If we're talking about bad habits, then you and Zabuza should stop peeing in the snow like animals," she informs them. Honestly, some habits go across dimensions.

"You're jealous because you can't," rumbles Zabuzza in a fit of insight. She makes a 'tch' sound as he drags his fingers across her scalp gently. He's also right. How sweet would it be to just pee anywhere like that? Pretty fucking sweet, if she says so herself.

"Okay, point, but swords suck. Everyone knows meteor hammers are the true best weapon."

Laughter from both of them. Kisame's is raspy and breathless, but it wracks his whole body. Zabuzza's sounds like pebbles jostling around in a bag, and she can feel it reverberate through his chest. The sound vibrates around the room, warm and hearty. She likes it. It makes her forget the frontlines for a little bit, makes her feel like those empty, Void filled pieces of her are full. She would fill the abyss inside her soul with the sound of their laughter if she could.

Her heart swells inside her chest, full of something like birds taking flight and a warm drink on a cold day. Ryuishi hides a smile against Zabuzza's thigh, and savors the heavy weight of Kisame on her legs.

They make her feel whole again.

AN: So, for people asking for a reunion, I'M WORKING ON IT. HAVE THIS TO DISTRACT YOU. Also, this chapter is dedicated to tumblr user taffyq, who was like 'alright, but what if the Kaijuu no Kiri were happy' and then made me have a bunch of feels. They know what they did.

Thanks to everyone who read, fav's and follows. Reviewers give me strong emotions which cause me to write chapters. It's a thing.

Also, shout of to... er, I forgot his name on here. Doors something rather. I'm just gonna say it later. He edited this like a champ, heap your praise upon him!

Q:Give me your oneshot ideas for this. Do it.

Between the Sheets

I do not own Naruto.

As Ryuishi grows, she cannot help but to acknowledge that hormones have reared their head once more. It's not unfamiliar, but it is annoying.

It's a well known nagging itch that burns through her blood and floods her veins. She finds herself staring a little too long at some of Orochimaru's subordinates, or her own. She lingers on the slender, fine hands of the planted spies, and the callused fingers of the weapons specialists. The messenger's sleek muscles covered in a thin sheen of sweat, glistening in the light like some sort of wonderful work of art, distract her so much that she gets punched right across the compound by Orochimaru. The soft skin, and well formed chest of a spy catches her eyes and holds them for an embarrassing amount of time.

The concept of a single sexuality, or romantic interest, has always kinda baffled Ryuishi. There wasn't a line for her, nothing was off limits. If she wanted to love somebody, or to sleep with somebody, it didn't really matter what they packed in their pants, skirt, or robes. Even if there was nothing at all behind the figurative piece of cloth, it didn't matter. She didn't give a shit about gender, or lack thereof, when it came to being attracted to someone.

She also was a firm believer that sex did not make a person horrible. Sex wasn't some great event, and it wasn't something to be ashamed of. Sex was like... well, ehhhh- It was natural, with a million variations, unique to each person. Most cultures seemed to consider it taboo, but some didn't. It ended happening to most people at some point or another, excluding a few.

That had remained the same in both worlds. The only thing that changed was that in this new world, there was more variety in the shits she did not give. After all, what the fuck was a Zetsu? She hadn't seen them yet, but they weren't exactly inherently one sex or another. Neither were the bijuu. Orochimaru was destined to switch bodies and genders countless times. Every one of them were sentient, intelligent beings (people) who didn't fit in the box.

This led to completely unexpected problems.

The problem, of course, being that as she was a chronically isolated criminal, on the run at all times. Add the fact that she was wary of sleeping with the wrong person and possibly messing up her carefully laid plans with complicated nonsense, and it made containing her libido an almost full time task.

No joke. It was like little things could set her off, raging faster than a wild fire. The ghost of breath against her skin, a arm wrapped around her as she woke up. Even things that weren't exactly vanilla had her anticipating a good romp. It should be obvious that a dangerous fight is not foreplay, but her body does what it does. She gets the weirdest boners.

She can only abuse the clone technique so much, too. Eventually, the irritation leads her to seek out relief.

She thinks of attempting to gather every gender under the rainbow to cash in her second life v-card with, but then she realized that organizing that would kind of be a hassle in her position. How does a notorious missing criminal collect the absolute plethora of people it would take to cover each possible base, and how does she know that they are, in fact, down to sleep with everybody else there while keeping it a secret from her enemies, her followers, and whatever Orochimaru is?

The answer is it's just not possible. She mourns for the idea, because it would have been a great way to get back on the horse, or

in her case, between the sheets. She also ignores the fact that she probably wouldn't have done it anyway. She's just not that brave.

She decides that she'll wait for it to come naturally. There's no point in forcing it, and whoever happens to find her, will find her.

Which is exactly how she finds herself in an out of the way tavern room, realizing that she is suddenly uncomfortable with the vulnerability that coitus presents.

Ryuishi isn't classically pretty, and she's very aware of every perceived imperfection as her crop top is shoved off her chest. Her muscles are too defined to be properly feminine. They have saved her life, and it doesn't usually bother her, but as a hand runs over them, she suddenly cares for some reason. The same goes for her scars.

Lips ghost over the raised skin along her ribs, fingers trailing along the marred flesh, and she is grateful that her partner didn't mind the blindfold. Her tattoo is an identifying mark, and she doesn't want a one night fling to recognize it. It would be-

Teeth nip at her neck, and she is shocked away from her thoughts for the moment. Her libido reminds her to live in the moment. Mostly by blanking her thoughts completely and stirring an endless, bone deep hunger inside her. Her mind is taken over by the wet slide of tongue against tongue, and the soft skin under her own hand, just beginning to perspire. Ryuishi has years of memories like this, from a life lived long ago, and she sinks into the comforting habit with little persuasion.

The smell of sweat permeates the air, and she isn't satisfied for hours to come, but the feel of a body against her own is a balm to her stress filled soul, just for the moment. They go underneath her, on top of her, inside her and out, and she relishes in it.

She lavishes in the sensation of her hair being pulled, and the scratches along her skin, her partner's hands moving in a desperate

search for relief. She rejoices in the imprints of her teeth on their chest and navel, and the long lines of red spanning their back and ribs.

The featherlight teasing, the murmured words, the grunts and quiet hisses. She missed this, she thinks deliriously at some point, especially the long, guttural moans.

When morning comes, she's already showered and on her way out. Her partner for the night is fast asleep, covered in the dappled light streaming through the window.

She doesn't really know them, and she probably never will. The night they shared is enough though, and she moves on like nothing has changed. Nothing really has, not really. She's still her, all jagged pieces and clever plans. Her muscles go back to being appreciated, and her scars remain melancholy reminders.

Ryuishi counts that as a start, and she *does* allow herself to continue the opportunistic hook-ups. Everytime she is careful to avoid being noticed for who she is, and the encounters never last more than a few days, if that.

She continues her life, and sex becomes a very small part of that. She moves around, and her time is consumed by work, but she keeps feeling like maybe she's missing something. She can't tell you what it is.

In those moments of brutal honesty in the serene dark of her home, sometimes she thinks that maybe it isn't a *what* at all, but a *who* .

AN: I wrote this, but I don't really like it? I enjoy the idea of it, and I think that it gets the point across, but it isn't really... idk. It's missing something. It's also not beta'd.

NO BETA. ALL MISTAKES ARE MY OWN.

Update: Take this as canon if you want or not. I wrote this specifically because I wanted to show that her losing her virginity change literally nothing. Like, she is exactly who she is, but now she has sex sometimes. Her virginity wasn't magical or special or anything like that. She had already experienced sex in her past life, and it's NBD. I think too many times sex is hyped up, but it's really not a fantastic, mind blowing, larger than life thing.

That's why it isn't a canon character. Not only would it mess up any relationship beyond measure, because it would complicate it, but also because I didn't want people to make MORE out of it. She also, as stated, feels vulnerable and kind of uncomfortable for a little bit. No way is she giving a ninja that type of ammunition to shoot her down with.

Family Means-

I do not own Naruto.

Naruto Uzumaki knows many things.

People might not think so. He isn't deaf, he can hear what people say. So what if sometimes it's hard to read words because sitting still, or focusing on one thing, is like trying to catch the wind in his hands? Who cares if it's hard to remember Kanji characters? He can read romanji and hirigana just fine. What does it matter if he doesn't understand why things are done the way that they are?

Naruto might have lots of energy, and he might not learn like other people, but he still knows things.

He knows what restaurants will serve food to him, and where he can get the best deals. He knows how to catch bugs with his bare hands, and how to leap across river stones. He knows how to share, how to cook food, how to smile, and have fun. He can make tea, and ramen, and he can run forever without getting tired. He knows how much money he gets each month, and how to make it last the whole time.

Naruto can set the best rope traps in his class, and he always knows just where to put them to capture the people he wants. He can take the most hits and still get up, and he can go longer than anybody else there. Naruto can hide forever and never get caught, and he can outrun even those masked people that jiji calls Anbu.

He isn't dumb, and he isn't blind or deaf. He knows that Fairy onee-chan came to his home when he was gone. He can smell her in his apartment, that flowery, salty, water smell. He almost cries because he thinks for just a second she came back, but he doesn't see her magic bag, or her silly smile. There are no slanted black eyes to

greet him when he comes home from the Academy, and there aren't any long black hairs on his couch.

She came, but she couldn't stay.

It makes him wonder if she ever wanted to.

For a second he feels so small and lost, because Fairy-nee doesn't visit him so much anymore, and he misses her. He misses her funny voice, and her scowling face. He misses her warm hugs, and her arms wrapped around him at night. He even misses the vegetables she cooks, and the oil she puts in her hair.

It makes him feel hollow when he thinks about her sometimes, like maybe he dreamed it up. He thinks of her standing alone in that crowd, telling him to run away, her body all outlined in light, glowing from the sun, her face scary and cold.

He shakes his head, clearing out his thoughts.

Fairy-nee is the one who tucked him into bed at night! She told him stories about Odayaka Oni, and Chujitsuna Same, and patted his hair! She cleaned his house, cooked him food, and did his laundry! She made sure he washed behind his ears, and taught him peeing on the seat was bad! She shared her food, and she said she loved him!

Fairy-nee is *family* .

"And family means that no one gets forgotten," he mumbles to himself, nodding his head. She said it herself.

Naruto takes a deep breath that night, and he lets her scent fill his nose. She wouldn't have come if she had forgotten him, and she wouldn't have done the dishes if she hated him.

He grins to himself, his eyes drooping closed. He doesn't care if that one kid has dogs, his pet is queen of the fairies. That's way cooler.

Often, when he has extra time to spare, or they just show up at his apartment, Naruto spends time with his other Nee-san's.

The weekend following his entrance into the Academy is no different. The smell of the Okiya has become familiar and comforting to him, the mix of exotic spices and perfumes mixing with the incense smoke from the altar they have. He likes the tatami mats, and the kotatsu table that sits in the the back room. He thinks their colorful robes are vibrant and pretty, and their sweat pants and night shirts are really comfortable.

Like he said before, Naruto isn't dumb. He knows what happens here, and he always leaves before nightfall, escorted home by one of the workers. Sometimes they don't even come here at all, and they go down to the river, the park, restaurant, or toy shop! People aren't so mean when he has them with him, and even though everybody looks at them bad and says mean things, they don't turn him away.

He learned from them too. Takeshi-san taught him how to make a grass whistle, and Mirai-san showed him how to mix paints to get the colors he wants. They gave him clothes, and brought him toys. The Okiya was his home, and they were his Nakama.

"-So then, I had to clean up the classroom again, because apparently 'bullshit' isn't acceptable language!" he whines petulantly as the aforementioned woman combs through his hair.

She laughs, and it sounds like bells. It's really weird.

"Naruto-chan, you scoundrel," she teases, "Sometimes some people don't like certain words. I imagine your teachers and some of the other children find them offensive."

"It's a word!"

"Well, so is demon and monster. Words have power," she soothes,

"That's different!" he protests, not knowing how to explain himself.

Across the room, Takeshi-san looks up from his book, looking over his glasses, his short black hair a mess.

"The word 'whore' is just a job title," he states, and Naruto flinches, "But it still can be offensive. It's all about who you are around. I wouldn't curse at school young man, or around your teachers and other children."

He pouts, and crosses his arms. It makes sense, kinda.

"Really now Naruto-chan, be reasonable. None of us curse like that. Where did you even hear that sort of language?" the man sighs.

"Fairy-nee says stuff like that all the time," he informs the man, his lower lip jutting out.

Misaki seems to start, and Takeshi just says ' ah ' as if that explains it. It really, really does.

"That reminds me! She left me something for you Naruto-chan, to congratulate you for entering the Academy," she chimes, putting the brush aside and standing up to go into the rooms.

Naruto leaps up from his place and follows after her, a shout of glee tumbling from his lips. His wide blue eyes open in excitement, and he can't stop the smile that spreads across his face, or the warm feeling in his heart.

Family means no one is forgotten, he thinks.

"She's very sorry she can't come, but her letters say she will be very busy now. Things have been picking up, and she has a lot of work to do, " Misaki-nee tells him, opening the sliding door to her quarters and heading toward the dresser. What she doesn't say is that there are steps she is taking to protect them all, and that she trusted Misaki with him. The brothel owner does not mention the funds they

were gifted with, or the heartfelt letter of regret that was left on her vanity. Misaki speaks nothing of how the ink had blurred in places over the letter to them all, stained with tears.

The Rakki Ryuu was part of a larger cause, and Misaki feels honored to be given the gift of time and attention she has. She feels even more blessed to be entrusted with a piece of the woman's heart in the form of the small boy.

"She says she misses you very much, and that she's very proud of you," the woman states, opening up the middle drawer and pulling out a box, handing it over to him.

"I miss her too," he says honestly, and the look she sends him is understanding.

"We all do honey," she assures him.

Naruto takes the box, and the first thing he notices is that it is heavy. The plain cardboard box is only around the size of a big brick, but it is....dense. That's the word nee-san would use.

"She said that she's sorry that she couldn't leave you a note," Misaki tells him, her blue eyes shimmering, "but she wrote some in mine."

Not that she has that one either. Both missives are long gone, turned into ash and buried in the garden. She will never allow the Rakki Ryuu to face danger because of her.

Naruto doesn't say anything. He simply tears away at the tape holding it together, peeling it back with his nails and teeth, burning with curiosity.

Inside he finds out why it was so very heavy. There is a whole starter kit inside, a very, very high quality one.

"Ohhhhhh," his whispers, pulling it free from it's confinement. Already he can see top grade ninja wire he is sure to use for traps, and kunai

and shuriken lined neatly in pouches, gleaming like new. There are sleek black caltrops, sharp senbon, files for chains, a lockpicking set, and a recipe for smoke specialty bombs.

His eye widens, and he stares at the gift, the silent acceptance of his career path. He couldn't buy this, not with six months worth of allowance! He might not even be able to find it! These were brand new tools, in a brand new pouch kit, a custom made order. Clan children got these, not him.

Underneath the kit, at the bottom of the box, are seeds.

"She says that if you choose this path, then you better be prepared. Those aren't toys, they are tools for survival, Naruto-chan. They can hurt people, and they can take a life."

He looks up, and he sees Misaki-nee watching him carefully, studying his face.

"The seeds are to help you remember that it takes time for things to grow. Patience and care are things you never want to forget."

He feels his eyes burning, because he won't forget, just like Fairy-nee didn't forget. She remembered him, and she cared for him. She accepts him, and she loves him, even though she isn't there.

She loves him, he is sure.

He remembers her in the gardens, looking down at the koi pond, her face so sad.

Naruto follows a quiet Misaki down the stairs, his new kit and seeds tucked inside the pockets of his baggy black pants. He eats stays for lunch, and he even eats his vegetables before he goes home again.

Naruto will become a ninja, and he won't let his friend die. He will become Hokage, and one day, he will help her find what she has lost.

(Eight months later, when he finally saves up enough money to try out the smoke bomb recipe, he laughs so hard he cries a little bit. The smoke they create is stinks like rotten eggs, and it makes the dog kid pass out. The best part is the rubber coating though, because when the pressure builds up and escapes, it sounds like a fart and smells like one too.

Best. Distraction. Ever.)

AN: So, one of the beginning ideas of this fic was that Naruto has smoke bombs that make farting noises when they crack open and stink like sulfur. Also, people wanted to see what Naruto was up to, so here it is. He's still Naruto, only not so driven to seek out any sort of attention, and not desperate to be accepted.

No beta, just me. Any mistakes are mine.

Siblings

I do not own Naruto. Just to be clear, Ryuishi is talking about the brothers in her past life.

Gaara looks up at Aneue, who holds him close, the rhythm of her steps jostling him around from his perch on her hip. Some people told him he was too old to be carried around by Aneue anymore, but he doesn't think they understand. Gaara's not the one who chooses to do this. Aneue is. She's always carrying him, before he can even try to walk.

He doesn't mind, of course. He likes it too.

He would focus more on the Bazaar, and cool autumn air, but he's thinking. He wants to ask questions, but he can't find the words. Not like Aneue, who always seems to have words coming out of her.

"If you keep wearing that constipated look on your face," she says suddenly, her dark eyes turning toward him, "People are going to think you need to take a shit."

He frowns as that thing inside him cackles at her words. That's bad language, and even though uncle isn't... after uncle tried too....

For an abomination of Nature, the beast spits manically, **She has a foul mouth** .

Gaara doesn't understand the thing inside him, or why he can hear it better after what happened. He doesn't want to hear it, because it is mean and says bad things. It calls Aneue names, and says she's a shade, touched by the Shinigami. It makes him uncomfortable.

"Bad language Aneue," he murmurs out, his eyes scanning the area. He needs to ask her, but he doesn't know how. It's just so hard. It confuses him.

"Yah, yah, but something's bothering you," she says, brushing his admonishment aside. "Just spit it out."

He turns his gaze toward her, and makes his eyes go wide. Aneue will understand, because she is a big sister, and she knows stuff. Like, stuff about families and things.

"I have... a brother and sister," he states.

It's weird, because he knew they were there, but in a vague sort of way. Yashamaru was his family, and sometimes his cold and distant father. Aneue was there, but those two... *things* weren't. He just knew they shared parents, which confused him as well.

It was all so strange. Father had ordered him to attend training with them now, and they lived together in a big building. He saw them everyday, and it was awkward. They stayed away, and looked at him with watchful eyes. They hadn't even said anything to each other.

Yet... he kind of wants to. Aneue showed him that sisters were important, and people tell him she had brothers at one time. Those two are afraid of him though, and it hurts. He wants to do something, he just doesn't know what.

Uncle left a hole in him, and it hurts. He doesn't want to ever hurt like that again, but Aneue has shown him he can't keep trying to ignore it. Love won't hurt if it's given to the right people. If it does, it is a good hurt, like the squeeze she has in her hugs, or the anticipation he feels when she isn't there. It's eclipsed by the feeling of warmth, of laughter, and of not being alone.

Social stuff is *hard* .

Something makes her flinch, and he thinks that it's sadness for a second. Deep and heavy, it flickers, then is gone.

"Ah, " she states. "I remember my siblings."

Of course she does, he thinks, he's right here.

"I loved them a lot, even though we fought all the time. One day I could be laughing at them, and the next we could be warning each other. Sometimes, when we felt really loving, we helped each other out with chores," she says calmly. A smile takes her face, and she turns to him.

"Once, when I was little, my brothers cornered me and hung me by the door by my underwear. Worst wedgie of my life. So the next day, when he was sleeping, I painted all over his face with permanent marker."

Gaara does not understand.

"What is a wedgie?" he asks.

"It's when you pull someone's underwear up really high in the back, and they get it stuck between their butcheeks."

"Why?" he asks, bewildered.

She seems to think about it for a while, turning ideas in her head.

"Siblings are weird," she starts. "Half the time we beat each other up, or farted on each other, or burped in each others faces. We called each other names and were generally little animals running around. Then again, my brothers beat up other people who were mean to me because only they held the right to torment me, and warned me if my parents were in a bad mood. They taught me things, and we shared stuff. I did the same for-"

Aneue stops, and that same look of hurt crosses over her face. He doesn't see bleeding, but he thinks it might be her heart that hurts. He knows about that now.

"Anyway, siblings are family. They stick with you when times are bad, and then are general buttholes when things are safe. You hurt each

other, but never give lasting injury on purpose. You say mean things, but you don't really mean them. Don't ask me why," she finishes.

Gaara doesn't understand, but he has an idea at least. Maybe he can try. After all, having Anue is fantastic. He wonders what having two more siblings would be like.

Gaara waits with a blank face for his opportunity. He doesn't want to risk messing this up, and failing in front of father makes him mad for some reason. So he doesn't do it during the silent, stifling 'family' dinner, or when the rest go to bed. He wants them to know he's trying.

He finds his chance during sparring the next day, when Temari is waiting on the side lines, watching him and Kankuro with wary, fearful eyes. She's waiting for him to hurt them, he knows it.

Gaara doesn't want to hurt them. He wants them to notice him, to like him.

Kankuro stumbles as he tries to make his puppet chase him. It isn't very good, and Gaara crushes it easy with a swarm of sand. The way the wood breaks into splinters is very satisfying.

Then, he sends the sand after his brother and wraps him inside of it.

"Stop!" his instructor cries out, stepping forward. But he won't. He has a plan. He needs to do this, to prove himself.

Kankuro looks sweaty and scared as the red-headed child envelops him in sand. He can feel it around his chest, scraping along his leg, moving him up in the air. He knows what comes next, the crushing feeling, his life being smothered out of him by intense pressure. He's seen what Gaara can do, when he was younger it used to happen all the time.

I'm going to die, he thinks. The demon is going to kill me. I hate him. I'm scared.

Sand creeps around his waist band, finding a hold. He waits for death.

Then, most of it drops away and he jerks downward. A strangled cry leaves his lips as his underwear remains in place, riding up and holding him there, dangling four feet above the ground by the waistband covered in sand.

Silence flows through the desert as Kankuro whimpers and clutches at his crotch, which is currently strangled by the confines of his underclothes. He doesn't understand. Is this torture?

Temari feels her face spasm as her utter and complete horror melts into bewildered delight. She tries to hold it in, because she wants to remain professional, but she can't.

Kankuro is *in the the air, spinning around*, and just got given a *super wedgie* by the *demon of the sand* .

A small snort escapes, and then a chuckle, and then she is laughing, loud and clear.

"Temari!" Kankuro cries out, betrayed.

She wonders how stupid it must have looked. They were so afraid of him, so bitter about their mother's death. He has killed people, and they said he was uncontrollable, but he *gave Kankuro a wedgie* .

What kind of demon does that?

Gaara watches, straight faced, as their instructor looks on in bewilderment. The jinchuriki has done his job. It was strange, and he doesn't understand, but Temari-san is laughing, which has to count for something at least. Laughter is good, right?

Aneue is so smart .

His brother finishes a slow spin, and his high voice and flushed face don't look very healthy. He should work on clearing his face of tells, Gaara thinks.

"Please, let me down!" he squeaks, and Gaara complies, dropping him immediately. He tumbles into the sand, face down, frantically rearranging his pants.

Temari laughs harder.

Nobody's quite sure what to think of the events of that day. What happened was a strange anomaly, like a shooting star crashing into earth, or ninja from separate villages meeting and promptly minding their own business. The jounin in charge had even gone to get a psyche eval, but it seemed that he was, in fact, as stable as he could be.

Kankuro still tip toes around Gaara, and Temari continues to shoot him odd, calculating glances.

He waits for another opportunity. It's like training, he thinks. One step at a time, until he has mastered a new skill. Only, it's one act at a time, until they stop being afraid.

Eventually, they won't be.

AN: So, I wanted to post this and say that this is how Gaara started bonding with his siblings in Canon. By doing absurd things with a straight face. Because nothing ruins good horror movie moments like the monster giving somebody a wedgie, or starting a food fight, or giving people rides on his really cool sand.

No beta, just me. All mistakes are mine.

The Dangers of Children

I do Not own Naruto.

Ryuishi has a terrible, horrible habit of spoiling children. It might be explained as a desire to give them chances and materials she never had in either life. It may be that she feels that childhood runs away too fast, and needs to be cherished. It could even spring from that gross, disgusting part of her that goes weak at the knees and blooms into warmth every time she sees a smile light up on someone's face because of what she has done.

Hell, if she's being honest, she doesn't really fucking know where it comes from. She adores children. She likes teaching them new things, and watching their faces light up in wonder. She loves forgetting rules and standards society has beaten into her, and regressing to a younger state of mind. She enjoys forgetting the blood that stains her hands like dye, and the foul things she does to survive in this world. She revels in remembering that there is good, that there is purity and wholesomeness.

Don't get her wrong, she isn't deluded. Kids can be the meanest, vilest creatures at times as well. They can poke wounds just to see the pain it causes, and incite fear because it makes them feel strong. Elementary school was a nightmare and a half for her in her old life.

It goes without saying that she doesn't exactly whoop in delight in the grosser aspects as well. Nobody is pleased to change a dirty diaper, or clean up vomit. Toddlers stick things in orifices that should not have items inserted into them all the time, and the messes the tiny devils can make are out of this world.

Kids are work. Kids are blood, sweat, and tears. Kids are money gone, house a wreck, and food nowhere to be found. Kids are

assholes who tear your heart out and stomp all over it in the best possible way.

Case in point, Haku.

Haku, who is eleven years old in a new and unfamiliar place. A boy with a tragic past testing the waters of his new home, and his newer guardian.

Ryuishi is delighted to have him here, no doubt about it. She loves his even temperament, and his big shoujo eyes.

When she presented him with his first binder, and told him that he was who he was, no matter what form he came in, his face had lit up with emotion. When she helped him pick out whatever clothes he wanted, because a boy is a boy even if he wears a yukata, her heart had swelled in size at the smile he sent her.

She likes how attentively he listens when she explains how to properly hold a kitchen knife, and how his fine hair is always a mess when he stumbles out of his room to breakfast in the morning. She is endeared by his manners, and his focus when he grinds herbs for healing balms.

She loves him, plain in simple. She would spoil him to the ends of the earth if she could.

Ryuishi will not, however, allow him this.

"No," she says again, even though his begging eyes are killing her.

"Ryuishi-sama, please," he tries for the umpteenth time. "I need to practice, and Zabuza-sama says you were a genjutsu mistress."

"I was," she agrees. "But I don't use them casually for a reason."

"How can I learn to escape then if I've never had one put on me?" he argues. "How will I know if I am trapped, or if what I am seeing is real?"

"You can practice them, but I'm not going to put one on you," she says firmly. "I know for a fact that Zabuza can do at least one Genjutsu technique."

The young boy frowns harder, staring up at her through thick lashes, his hands clasped in front of him beseechingly. The boy is adamant, but he doesn't know what he's asking. He doesn't know what she would show him, a nightmare that no living soul should see.

She won't do it, almost never does it anymore. Genjutsu is her last resort these days. Even though it is so, so easy for her to reach out and control another person's chakra, to twist it and manipulate it, warping their idea of reality. Even though it's the strongest tool in her arsenal, powerful enough to ensnare a Sannin, she refuses.

"Master Zabuza's strength lies in other areas," Haku defends. It's a nice way of saying that the man can cleave a person in half and fight for days on end, but finite chakra control escapes him at times. His genjutsu is... passable at best. He forgets details, like shadows and smells, or just ruptures the technique by pouring too much chakra in it.

"Haku, you're killing me with that face," she edges, looking for Zabuza for assistance.

"I'll surely stop if you cast an illusion on me," he pleads.

She slides her gaze back to him, straining.

"Why don't you practice casting them instead?" she tries. "I'll stay still and you can attempt to put one on me."

"Ryuishi-sama! I need to learn to defend myself, please, just use one. Zabuza-sama told me that many times your ability to ensnare people in Genjutsu has allowed him time to eliminate them as a threat. What if that happens, and I get trapped, and somebody uses that opening against me?"

She freezes as she looks at the boy. He's so small, and he doesn't know, but that *hurts* . It hurts to imagine that, to imagine him dead and dying with an arm punched through his chest. It's so easy to do, too see the ways she could fail him, fail them both.

"I won't do it," she croaks.

"But what *if*," he presses. "You and Master Zabuza can't be there all the time, and things can happen."

She sucks in a breath, because he's right and she can fail. He's young, but they were younger during the war. They were just kids, and they fought those who were little more than children themselves. She remembers Squad Eleven, and Suikami who couldn't have been more than thirty. The walking arsenal who died trying to defend his genin, those kids who ended up dying anyway.

Her world is painted for a moment in hues of crimson red and vivid orange, fire burning against the blackness of night. Kumo nin like ants crawling down the cliffside, and the hideous wet slide of a blade through Kisame's leg. The raw, burned mess of Zabuza's thigh. She's failed before and it can happen again. Has it ever really stopped?

Ryuishi smells weapons oil and feels a steadying presence at her back, warm and safe. She feels a large hand on her shoulder, grounding and real, and she feels so grateful it hurts.

"It won't occur," a gravely voice sounds. "I told you we would practise genjutsu later Haku."

The boy looks put out by the words, pouting and disappointed.

"I thought if I got a head start I could surprise you," he grumbles. "You said she was really good, so..."

"Her Genjutsu isn't for kids," intones Zabuza.

"I'm not a kid!" He defends sharply. "I can take it, I'm old enough, it's just an illusion! Give me a chance Master Zabuza!"

"Haku," Zabuza states firmly. "Enough."

The boy immediately deflates at the demanding tone, sinking down on himself like a collapsing souffle. He doesn't understand, because it's just an illusion. It's a trick, and he's sure he can withstand it.

"The only time I use genjutsu," Ryuishi says quietly, sliding her eyes over to the boy. "Is when I am fighting for my life, or the lives of those I love. Cuts on a person can heal. They scar over and leave marks, yes, but genjutsu doesn't cut skin. It wounds the mind, Haku, and there are some things you can't forget, no matter how hard you try."

She tilts his head up to meet her eyes, bending down just the slightest bit to be more on his level.

"When I use genjutsu, I inject my chakra into a point right here," she says, prodding the crown of his head, around the frontal lobes. "It slides in, and it makes things that aren't real seem real. Every sight, sound, smell, taste, and feeling falls under my control, and it seems just as real as you or I. Only, my chakra does something more everytime I use a genjutsu, something terrible that can't be described with words. I won't show you that Haku."

"Ryuishi-sama," Haku whispers. He tries to imagine her chakra inside him, and he shivers. It always feels vile and unnatural against his senses, just as Master Zabuza's feels violent and evil.

"So you will practice with Zabuza instead of me. Understand?"

He nods his head, and flushes when the woman smiles at him, sweet and snaggletoothed. He doesn't even try to squirm when she leans in to press a kiss against his forehead before drawing away again.

"Now, go run two laps down the beach," she orders, and Haku makes a protesting sound in the back of his throat. He looks to Zabuza pleadingly.

"Don't try to subvert orders by asking her when I already told you to wait," Zabuza states dryly, amused at the expression.

The boy hangs his head with a sigh, because sand is hard to run in. It eats his momentum and slows speed considerably.

The two watch him go, and for a moment, Ryuishi lets herself lean back against Zabuza, blinking away the last of Squad Eleven and locking the images in the darkest parts of her mind yet again.

"You think we can manage to not fuck him up terribly?"

"No," answers Zabuza honestly. "He's going to be a spoiled brat if this is the way you punish him."

Ryuishi elbows the man in the gut and steps away, flicking her hair behind her.

"Better than pretending he doesn't make mistake at all, like somebody I know," she answers.

Zabuza doesn't deny it, and she sighs. If the boy is a little sheltered and spoiled, well, he'll still come out ahead of the game. Besides, her way of punishment is great. He'll be amazing at cardio as he gets older.

AN: No Beta, all mistakes are my own. Just a casual reminder in here to say that Ryuishi still has hell of issues and is a sucker for kids, and also that having someone there helps. Another casual reminder that Haku isn't perfect, no one is. Also that Zabuza is a stern taskmaster.

Fallout

I do not own Naruto. This takes place a little bit in the future, and is kinda ahead of OTRATS chap. 74.

Hoshigaki Kisame walks the halls of the Ame hideout in silence, leisurely strolling toward the command room, where he knows he can deliver the freshly stolen scroll before returning to his quarters. He cannot wait to shed the wet, heavy cloak adorning his shoulders, and collapse into an actual bed. Not a shitty, too small for his body, worn springs and broken frame, tavern bed, but his actual mattress. The one he purchased, big enough to fit three of him, and with fitted sheets so soft it could make an angel weep.

Beside him, his young partner strolls onward, stoic and silent as usual. His coal eyes sweep their surrounding instinctively, and Kisame knows that old scroll is a thousand times safer in Itachi's pocket than some shitty archive in Waterfall.

He rubs his nose, which itches from just remembering that dusty tomb. Sure, the guards had been pretty fun to tangle with, but the place was some giant library, and they had spent forever just trying to locate this one item. Honestly, it was boring as all hell, and he's pretty sure that he saw the kid slip more than one scroll into his cloak for his own personal perusal. Which is fine by Kisame, because the kid deserves to enjoy himself, and who's going to miss a couple scrolls among those thousands?

The pair turns the corner before the doorway, and another pair seems to be exiting where they will be entering. It's the Zombi Combo, the weird immortals that Kisame believes wouldn't be out of place in a fairytale. A real couple of weirdoes, and they looked thrashed.

The tall man grins upon seeing them. It's an feral expression, to be sure. Any opponent that could deal that much damage to those two would be a fun fight. Certainly more fun than a glorified library.

"Well, you two look like you met the wrong end of Rice Country harvester. What the hell happened?" he asks casually.

Acid green eyes flick up to him, and he pauses for moment as they approach. The others don't say a word, but something about their injuries seems off to him.

His small eyes track their wounds again. He notes the impressive indent on the older nin's chest, and he senses the loss of a substantial amount of chakra. There is a grim set to his eyes that he only gets when he's been punished for failure.

The shirtless zealot is what tips him off though, because he's quiet, like he usually is around Kisame, but he's also smug. He smirks victoriously at the taller man even though his pale skin is littered with still healing wounds. Parts of him look angry and raw, as if there was a large period of time between re-attachment, and there are livid slice marks around his limbs. Almost every line looks clean, purposeful and masterfully separated, save for two.

There is and angry, swollen welt around his arm, where it looks clawed and shredded. Not a clean slice through, but a rabid severing by brute force. It brings back old memories.

More nostalgic, however, is the still missing piece near his neck. There are familiar indents in the shape of teeth, and furrows in his skin where is attacker tried to dig in around the bite, using their nails on the vulnerable area.

Kisame inhale sharply, and he feels shock and anger course through him.

"Your neck," he accuses, but the white haired man grins, manic and smug.

"She doesn't fuck around, does she?" the Jashinist croaks. "Sweet little monster like her, she takes a piece of you and she fucking swallows it, doesn't she?"

Kisame shouts, and his hand darts out before he can even think about it. It wraps around the smaller man's neck like a vice, crushing in power, but the fanatic simply laughs. He laughs and laughs and laughs, and Kisame can feel his blood boil inside his veins.

"Why you so angry big blue?" he wheeze out. "Orders are fuckin' order, and I ain't never enjoyed mine so much."

Kisame realizes how true that statement is, and his rage redirects itself. He crushes the white haired man's throat, his fingers brushing over the hollow where there once was flesh, before throwing the limp body as hard and far as he can. It cackles at him, and the sound echoes in the halls as Kisame storms through the door at the end of the hall with a new found vigor, Itachi by his side.

" *WHERE IS SHE!?* " he demands to those supposedly his superiors, the door slamming shut behind him.

Inside, the previously conversing duo stops their conversation, their eyes locked onto the raging man before them, who seems to have doubled in size.

"I asked one thing when I committed myself to this organization. *WHERE IS SHE ?*" he roars, and the duo sits so calmly before him. So still and gentle when he can only see red. He punches the wall in his frustration, and the concrete crumbles under his power. His knuckles bleed, but it doesn't matter.

"Kisame," comes a commanding tone. An orange masked figure melts from the shadows, previously unnoticed, followed by the torso of a wickedly grinning bi-colored being. "Control yourself."

Kisame whirls on the newest addition to the room, bearing his teeth like a beast.

"All information on her was supposed to be delivered to me first. I was the one that was supposed to bring her in. *Me*," He stresses through clenched teeth. "WHY THE HELL WHERE THOSE TWO SENT?"

The shorter masked man stalks forward, unperturbed by the giant's wrath. He examines the others among them calmly, considering his words carefully.

"The rumor was unconfirmed. It was determined that it would be a waste of time to withdraw you from your operation, and the next best qualified team was sent in your place," the Uchiha explains.

"Obviously, you were *wrong*," the blue man spits relentlessly. "I don't see her here."

"There were... extenuating circumstances," the orange haired pseudo-leader interjects placidly. "Variables unforeseen."

"The Rakki Ryuu has been very busy, it seems," the Uchiha agrees.

Kisame feels a hand on his back, a reassurance of his partner's presence, and a silent reminder to calm down. He struggles to leash his fury, visibly shaking with the effort.

"As I said before, it was an unconfirmed leak, but it was the best lead we had. Obviously, it turned out to be both true and false at once," the true leader of the Akatsuki continues. "Very much in her style, it seems."

Kisame isn't in the mood for word games. If he was ever further from the mood, he couldn't say when.

"Explain," he demands sharply.

"Your old unit has had a reunion without you, it seems, and they have taken in a Yuki ward," the man states casually.

The words feel like a physical blow, because while he remains unsurprised, it still stings. They began as a duo before he entered the scene, but it was Kisame who discovered her first. It was Kisame who tested her for the Academy, and it was Kisame who knew her better than anyone. Not Zabuza, *him* .

"Not only that, but there was another team. A genin squad from Konoha. She seemed remarkably attached to them for a missing nin, and we can only conclude that she has had previous contact with them and their jounin sensei," bites the Uchiha sharply.

Itachi gives no tell, but inwardly, he winces. She treads thin ice, playing so many games at once, and though he knows her heart, her mind remains a mystery. Her need to help could be her ruin.

"None of this matters," Kisame protests.

"Oh, but it does. Her attachment to the people around her made her unstable, and she not only deduced that she was a target, but she took steps to defend the collateral at great cost to herself."

Kisame feels his gut sink into his feet, because he *knows* her. Maybe it's been years, but she has always been a danger to herself when fighting with a squad. Her need to defend them was suicidal, and her loyalty to individuals she cared about was insane. She always took blows from opponents she was not fit to fight against just so others wouldn't have to take them. In a fight like this, it could be lethal.

"It also seems that among the Konoha squad, there was not only the last remaining Uchiha in The Land of Fire, but the nine tails Jinchuuriki as well. She's been collecting assets, it seems. She's far more than a political tool with abundant resources and ties. She's directly connected to the Akatsuki's interests now," the masked man finishes.

Kisame feels dread replace the rage in his body, because not only has she once again taken more than she can handle, but she's made herself a target. She's out there somewhere with finicky leaf

nin, and while he trusts Zabuza to guard her, he knows that in she's wouldn't survive a fight with an Akatsuki. Especially if her opponent was that psycho.

"Is she-?" he asks, but he can't force the words out. They stick in his throat like a curse, because he can't think on it. He can't begin to imagine that he was too late.

"She's alive," comes the unsettling voice of the torso emerging from the wall. A yellow eye locks with his, and Kisame hates the look that plant bastard sends him. " **Barely** ."

"Zetsu was kind enough to watch over the fight, and you should be grateful he did," The leader states haughtily. "He was able to finally place a tracer on her. Finding her again will be much simpler."

"It wasn't easy. **The bitch likes water so much, the spores kept washing off, and her chakra doesn't absorb right,**" the plant man explains. "Keeps killing the trackers. They're transporting her body to Konoha, and she hasn't stabilized yet. **Tricky business, keeping her alive with how much damage she took. The brat they have is an acceptable medic.** "

It's not relief that fills Kisame, but apprehension. She's alive, yes, but for how long? He never thought she might die before he could get his chance to settle things, that the very organization he serves might be the ones to do it. She was so determined, and he always thought she could do anything. The legends made her out to be larger than life, and he forgot how very fragile and human she is.

"I'll kill him," Kisame whispers. "That white haired zealot is dead."

"Hidan was beguiled," interjects a feminine voice tonelessly. "Your old teammate used her genjutsu to great effect in the conflict. It appears that the rumors stating she lost her skill in that area are untrue. She blurred the lines between reality so much, he lashed out at her instinctively, unaware of the actual damage he was dealing. The team will be punished accordingly."

Kisame bites his tongue, but he does not rescind his statement.

Itachi watches his partner and knows the Zombi combo will pay, not only for usurping his chance, but for the damage they inflicted. He remains blank, but he feels vindicated, knowing that he made the correct choice. Her need to help may ruin her, yes, but it also guarded those around her as well. His little brother may be traumatized, but he is alive and well, and the same figure Itachi owes his clan's continued existence for now claims an ever greater debt. She guarded not only his honor, but his heart as well.

"I'm going," Kisame states bluntly, and his tone brooks no argument. He will go to Konoha. He will talk to her. He will see her again, and nothing will stop him.

"In good time, Kisame. If the spores reveal she has recovered, you will be sent. I promise you this, but before then, we will allow Konoha to heal her for us if it can be done," the leader states.

"Konoha has the best medical care in the world," Pein states placidly. "Have faith."

"Konoha is filled with disease and corruption," Kisame fires back. "I trust that village even less than I trust the one that reared me."

"A wise choice," amends his recruiter. "But trust that they aren't so stupid as to set their own bijuu container off by allowing someone he holds dear to die."

Kisame clenches his hands into a fist, and he snarls. The anger and dread inside him feed off of each other, and he knows he will not waste anymore effort for this organization until his deal is fulfilled. Not when she's out there, at death's door. Not when she's playing with forces far beyond her control. Not when she still has that same drive, the self-destructive and insane tendencies she has always had. They have a short amount of time left before he goes to fulfill his desires on his own terms.

"No other teams," Kisame states again. " / will be the one to bring her home."

"As we agreed," states the swirl-masked figure agreeingly.

Itachi procurs the scroll from inside his roll and tosses it through the air. Konan raises her arm to catch it, her amber eyes glued to the swordsman that whirls, stalking out of the room in a temper, his partner quickly following after.

For a moment, the three rulers sit in silence, absorbing the information that has been gathered. It was a rather emotional outburst from one of their members that was usually the most professional.

" Pretty dramatic for a guy that abandoned her for twelve years,"
States Zetsu observantly.

Inside his head, Obito thinks that time isn't a good measure for relationships. It's been thirteen years since Rin was murdered, and the wound still bleeds. If anything, it is more raw than ever after recent events, where Kakashi failed to protect yet another woman from harm. He sympathizes with Hoshigaki, if nothing else.

Were Rin alive, he would have done anything for her, including working in an S-rank organization to build a place to keep her safe.

AN: Hey, look. Akatsuki being Akatsuki. Also, hey look at what Kisame's been up to. Why, was he scheming like Ryuishi? And Itachi is in here too. Nice. Also, the first appearance of Obito, who is projecting very hard. I'd like to point out that while he's projecting himself on Kisame, he also has no qualms about using Ryuishi. Maybe OOC. IDK yet.

All mistake are mine. No beta for this, only me.

Blood in the Water, Fire on the Land

It's been two years since she settled with her choices and Ryuishi feels... old.

It's a sensation in her bones; a weight, a hollow sort of density that sits in her ribs like lead. The number of years on her soul hangs across her shoulders like a shroud, constant and pressing. Sometimes it lingers in the line of her jaw, touching ever so faintly in the corner of her eyes. There are lines there now, faint ones she never grew old enough to see in her past life, and each one feels like it carries a metric ton.

It so much more than her body's age, instead something ephemeral and intangible that somehow takes shape in the heart of her. How many years has she been living now? How many in this world, and the one before?

She doesn't know. Stopped counting things in years, only events.

She was born. She lived, she loved, she grew and played and learned. She died.

She was born. She lived, she loved, she grew and fought and fought and fought and learned.

Fights. Learns.

And still, somehow, with all that fighting and learning, she ends up here. Staring at the orange glow of a fire that will take days to burn itself out, eating its way across the plains of Grass Country, ravaging the countryside and laying waste to crops and homes alike. The heat of it prickles at her cheeks, and the ash falls from the sky like a gentle rain, sizzling where it lands on her damp skin.

There is no trail to find. There is nothing left but embers, she thinks passively, her heart weary but unmoved. Clever Hanako. Clever,

clever Mumei.

She should have seen it coming, really. She taught them this trick decades ago when Kiri burned.

Her body shifts, unnatural chakra pooling at the base of the feet submerged far below her. It's like finding grip midair, and the liquid solidifies into something that will hold her weight. Though the current still tugs at her clothes and hair, she rises steadily, smoothly ascending from the waters into the fiery night. Her movements are practiced and smooth, as old as she is in her soul, and there is no noise to give her away. No sound to speak of from her.

Nor is there any sound from the man already on the bank.

She turns to look at him anyway, his silhouette cast in dancing red and yellows. A strong build, sturdy and tall. He looks fierce, she thinks, the jutting lower half of an Oni's jaw -all teeth and wicked snarls- covering the lower half of his face. Combined with his cutting eyes, it's quite the picture. But not enough of one to stop her gaze from flickering just a further down to his chest. Even in the unsure light she can see it, that pasty paper white flesh keeping Zabuza alive, the remnants of a deal made with a trickster to pay for her mistake.

Something oozes inside her head, sloshing around a bit. The faded spark of a rage not just her own, accompanied by loss. The niggling sensation that there should be a smaller figure beside him, all ice and composure and a piece of her heart.

Ryuishi turns away, toward the fire once more.

There used to be a village here, several hundred yards from the edge of the river to allow for the flooding that naturally occurs every season. It was small, a stopover town built up over the past few years. It produced little other than agricultural goods, but there was a glass shop on one of the beaten dirt paths. The crafter in there used dye to turn sand up from suna into works of art, twisting the molten

material like taffy into creations and colors that could take you breath away.

Idly, she wonders if that's where they started the blaze. It would be a tactically sound, the glass ovens kept hot near constantly so the glass inside did not destroy them, and wood placed out back to feed those ovens. The powders and minerals that brought out such rich color could be added to and tweaked to make something a bit more destructive. Something not what it was meant to be. Another errant thought ponders if that crafter is dead, while a third yet asks how the Mumei knew. How they figured out that she was close.

A heavy hand rests itself on her shoulder, warm despite the chill of the water. But, then again, almost everything feels warm to her her these days, contrasting with her uncomfortably cold skin. A symptom of a deeper shift.

"I will put it out."

The voice is deep and warbling, the presence at her back towering over her smaller frame. Kisame is, as ever. a behemoth of a man, his eyes reflecting light in the night the way no human's could. His presence is a shroud against her back, solid and sturdy and so, so careful still.

"Suiton on that scale is a dead giveaway. The Mumei aren't the only ones being hunted," Zabuza grumbles from the bank. His voice is coarse, rough, even half muffled behind his new mask.

Ryuishi doesn't make a face at the pronouncement, simply accepting the truth of the statement. The three of them have forever been targets in some shape or form, but these days the number of those who wish to see them stopped has grown exponentially. The semi-regular opportunistic bounty hunter and enemy nin has morphed and stretched into entire nations worth of ninja on the lookout, waiting for a word, a whisper of The Kaijuu. Of the Ryo.

It is not wholly undeserved, she thinks. In most ways, she has earned it.

Conniving and deceiving your way into power for around three decades will do that. Especially when one of your factions goes rogue and lights the fuse of a long-standing silent grudge by killing off a despot who was implied to rule by divine right. That single action, in turn, igniting a ruthless civil war and ramping up tensions between civilian, noble, and shinobi across the elemental nations.

All that's to say nothing of the undead menace with a too powerful eye and the literal eldritch horror mucking about.

"Only really have to worry about Konoha this close to the border. They're the only ones with the skill and attention to spare right now," Kisame returns.

"And Suito of that level would get them to send who?"

Ryuishi's stomach twists oddly, and she's unsure if it's her own reaction or a ghost of another's. There's a flash in her mind's eye of silvery hair and the smell of ozone, a man leading a sunshine child - her heart, her child - away on a beach that is melting into a graveside.

She blinks and it's gone, but her distaste for a mixed headspace lingers.

"Doesn't matter. We have shook him before, we'll do it again."

"But they will know where we were. Useful information."

"Not something they can do much with."

Zabuza grunts. It is, she supposes, true in some ways and not in others. If someone does figure out where they were tonight, not much would change. Another sin might be added to their long and sordid list of them, but at this point, that scroll is so long it would take

scribe weeks to right anyway. Not that scribes are a thing, here. They are unneeded, even among the rural towns these days. The population is growing past that, learning in new schools, rapidly outstripping previous generations with innovation and development. So quick, so clever. These days, people just know things.

Maybe things that make they shouldn't, like tonight.

"The Mumei knew they had a tail. I can't say if they knew it was us, but they knew something was up. They shouldn't have. We need to know how."

The men shift, her husky, ruined voice drawing their attention. The hand on her shoulder tightens its grip briefly, broad fingertips pressing in to the corded muscle of her shoulder. For a moment, the only sounds following her words are the steady crackling of flames, the soft drip of water from her clothes, and the running river beneath them.

"We'll get them, Ryuishi," Kisame says softly. His voice is closer now, and she can feel the rough material of his traveling cloak brush against own clothes. "People can't run forever, not even nameless ones."

Her eyes stray toward the flames, a part of her already thinking of cargo to be moved and calculating the loss of product in the harvest, crunching numbers as it recalls the direction of the wind and close by settlements.

"Monster's can," Zabuza answers, and Ryuishi looks at him once more. She doesn't know how to feel about that distinction, what to think of it.

These days, she doesn't know much of what to think at all.

AN: I don't know what I am doing here and have ideas but no concrete plans to continue but I posted this on my Tumblr and

felt it was good enough to deserve a place here. Somehow, these characters refuse to die so here they are again.